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Editors

Prof. Nigamananda Das

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Editor-In-chief

Dr. Vijay Kumar Roy



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Editorial

The changing global socio-political trends have necessitated emergence of new areas of studies and research in the humanities and social sciences. Besides language, literature and culture, ecofeminism has emerged as an important area of interest. The eighth volume of *Ars Artium* offers research papers entitled "Gender Exploitation in Igboland: Exploring Stories from Lejja *Omaba* Chant and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie" by Dr. Uchechukwu Evelyn MADU; "Hyphenated Identities in M. G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*" by Ms. Krupa Sophia Jeyachandran and Dr. Urvashi Kaushal; "Dealing with Monstrous Identities in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*" by Mr. Somedutta Mukherjee; "The Conflict Between Traditional and Modern Awareness in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City*" by Mr. Vinay Kumar Dubey; "Greek Oedipus' 'Story and the Ethiopian Skendes' Story" by Prof. Chiramel Paul Jose; and "Ecofeminism in Indian Fiction: A Select Study" by Dr. V. Pala Prasada Rao, Mr. Palepu Srinivas and Mr. Ganta Srinivasulu.

Peace Studies has become a very important area of studies in the wake of conflicts between different nations, increase of violence on the names of religions and races, use of military actions, 'trade war', and 'sanctions against some countries.' The environment of distrust, mistrust and fear of future wars have resulted in amassing arms and ammunition. So there is a need of creating mutual trust, and respect for one another's race, region and religion. In this respect we have published two book reviews: *IFLAC Anti-War and Peace Anthology* (2018) edited by Ada Aharoni and Vijay Kumar Roy and *From the Nile to the Jordan* (2017) written by Ada Aharoni. Both books have been reviewed by Mr. Toni Matthias Mey. The first book brims with articles, interviews, poems and paintings contributed by the peace lovers of two dozen countries, all based on spreading peace, love and mutual trust. The second book by Aharoni also seeks the possible ways for establishing peace between two nations.

We have good poems on different themes contributed by eight poets from India, Israel, Canada and the USA. I believe, this volume of *Ars Artium* will be very useful to the readers as were previous ones.

Wishing you all a very happy, healthy and fruitful New Year 2020!

Dr. Vijay Kumar Roy

Editor-in-chief

Gender Exploitation in Igboland: Exploring Stories from *Lejja Omaba* Chant and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie

*Uchechukwu Evelyn MADU**

Abstract

In traditional Igbo society, gender exploitation is always a negative trait of the male folk. Men are usually the victimizers while women and girls are the victims. Because they are physically stronger than women, the men perpetrate such crimes as battery, rape and other violent assaults on them. This paper explored the depiction of gender exploitation in *Omaba* chant (*Egara Omaba*), an all-male Igbo masking chant composition, and *Americanah* to ascertain the extent of the employment of the concept of exploitation and its implications in the texts. The Theory of Otherness by the Existentialist, Simone de Beauvoir (1949), was critically deployed to determine the "Dominator" and the "Dominated" in the texts. Among the findings is that exploitation is employed positively in contradiction to the Igbo traditional ethics, to highlight the inestimable power of woman that she exercises at will. Although physically weaker, a woman in the contemporary world of competition and scarcity of resources could manipulate a man against his wish, and use him as a metaphorical rung to climb to her identity, independence and societal success. The findings, therefore, reverse the principles of the Theory of Otherness which assigns the victim role to the woman.

Keywords: Gender, Exploitation, Moral decadence, Otherness, Ethics reversal.

Introduction

In feminism, women are the sufferers of misogyny as a result of the superiority role placed on men by patriarchy. According to Jessica Kravis et al, "Women in Greek mythology were perceived to be more as sexual objects than individuals. Many were taken advantage of by the gods and by human beings" (n.d). Also, Kravis posits that,

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in the "Elizabethan Literature, women were not looked at as a person but were considered a mere necessity for the procreation process." Early feminists like Mary Astell argue that women are exploited because of "poor education" and "custom" (quoted in Simeon Webb, 2013). In order not to be influenced negatively by the menfolk, "Mary Wollstonecraft advises that women should not be confined to domestic work, they need to get proper education like men" Weijie, Chen (2010). That is to say that a woman's lower financial status makes her dependent on man and therefore prone to masculine exploitation.

In the Existentialism Theory of Simeone de Beauvoir, the term "other" is a structuralist concept that applies the binary opposition in the definition of characters in literature. While one group appears more important and highly valued, the other possesses less or is valueless; for example, oppressor/oppressed and victim/assailant. Otherness, with regard to gender, means the negative values that are depicted in a character. In other words, the proper characters can be distinguished by their difference from the improper characters who are represented as somehow "other" to the norm. This study shall base its investigation on the Dominator and the Dominated oppositions in order to assign values to the characters in the texts.

As a result of the numeral challenges of the competitive contemporary world like migration, racial discrimination, natural disaster, scarcity of resources and violence, the survival of the fittest mantra resonates. Woman, just like the folkloric trickster, weaker in physical strength, has to survive. In other words, there must be a survival mechanism. It is based on the propositions that Americanah and Egara *Qmaba* (*Qmaba* chant) are explored in order to highlight the challenges of woman in meeting the demands of modernity. In order to successfully portray the power of the modern woman, Adichie sees positivity in negating the traditional ethical values.

Woman in Igbo Folklore

Women in Igbo folklore have been given a paradoxical depiction by previous researchers. Chukwuma Azuonye (1992) opines that women in Igbo are viewed as both powerful and powerless. The woman's image as a powerful being is manifest in the role of the Earth goddess -*Ala*. Earth in this case symbolizes the source of sustenance for mankind, the ancestral abode and a place for the eternal cycle of rebirth. It is also a place where mankind retires to in death, and as well the pathway to the spiritual world of rebirth. This image of woman is revered because it is known for justice retribution. On the other hand, Azuonye maintains further that the powerless image of woman refers to the negatively portrayed woman who is seen as inferior to man. This type of image includes the morally debased woman, and the stupid woman. Azuonye argues that the latter image of woman is a feminist import and that it came along with the patriarchal nuances of the west.

Also, Damian U. Opatá highlights the powerfulness and powerlessness of woman in the ambivalent pair of woman and the Deity. According to him, an Igbo proverb says, "*Onye maa negbugi ne nwanji gbur* - One who is not killed by Deity is killed by woman" (95). In the analysis of the proverb, Opatá posits that woman shares the same trait of killing as Deity. While Deity kills to punish for abomination and other

atrocities that tend toward revealing the personality of the Deity, a woman, according to the Igbo, kills through starvation and bad cooking, through luring a man away from his family, through betrayal, by bewitching someone with charms and through concealed adultery. Opatá concludes that since woman just like the Deity is capable of inflicting destruction on a man, man apportions the same fear which he gives the Deity to woman (99). Opatá posits that the proverb serves as a warning for men that what is dear to them can harm them. Therefore, they should always be cautious when dealing with a woman (107). He observes, however, that most of the time the Igbo fail to put into consideration the "sublime, honourable, admirable, wonderful and imposing characteristics of woman;" instead they reiterate the "dangerous" and "capricious" aspects.

Nnadozie Inyama (1992) explores the rebel image of woman in Igbo. The rebellious woman is against the tradition on the occasion of choice of spouse. Inyama examines the representation of this proposition in the "rebel girl motif" in the West African folklore. According to him, the motif is always depicted in the "damsel in distress" which is a key motif in quest narratives. The stories are always woven around a very beautiful lady who rejects all her townsmen and looks out for the perfect gentleman in a stranger. In most cases, the strangers turn out to be mysterious beings, monsters, who borrow human body parts to make themselves attractive. It is these set of men that such women admire and immediately fall in love with, at their own detriment.

Inyama, however, argues that the "rebel girl motif" could have been an offshoot of feminism and liberalism which expose women to being in conflict with the traditional pattern of marriage. He also posits that the conflict most often end against the lady because the tradition is keen on retaining its best products. However, he also observes that some writers manipulate the rebel girl pattern to suit whatever opinion they want to express. In other words, some writers allow their heroines to excel in the challenges that come as a result of their defiance of traditional lores and customs. Inyama concludes his investigation by proposing that a woman who marries across borders paves the way for both personal and national development since her exposure to other cultures contributes to her social improvement.

For Ambrose Monye (1992), the Igbo folklore celebrates the woman as a mother symbol because she takes care of both her children and husband. In other words, panegyric songs are performed to commend women for their remarkable roles while satirical songs are also displayed to lampoon them for the societal ills they commit. According to him, the panegyrics celebrate mothers during marriage for their ability to raise virtuous daughters who attract the attention of suitors. Such songs are also directed to the bride because of her untainted beauty and character until adulthood. She is also praised for "making her parents and community proud for accepting to settle down to procreate and train her children" (66). The panegyrics, therefore, suggest that characters with character traits exalted should be passed on to the next generation. On the other hand, satirical songs are directed against sexual proximity, pre-marital pregnancy, infidelity, improper training of children and poor management of husband. In conclusion of his study, Monye admonishes:

And in no other setting is the need to watch how human beings as greater than in rural communities where everyone is his brother's or sister's keeper, where whatever the individual does affects his/her next door neighbour. Since society either gains or loses from the conduct of the individuals in it, there is a need for people to concern themselves with commenting on what their neighbours do day in day out (74).

Christine Ohale (1992) also shares the same opinion as Monye that women use satirical performances to lampoon the bad behaviour of their fellow women. In addition to Monye's thesis, Ohale holds that satirical performances are only the occasions where women express themselves freely. In other words, the dance steps and their diction suggest crudity as they call all the sexual organs by their native names as against their western versions which may be mild to the senses. According to Ohale, satirical performances also mean moments of freedom for women.

For Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, women in Igbo folklore represent custodians of tradition. They tell folktales and inculcate core values of the land in their children and youth, thereby ensuring that the values are passed on from one generation to another. In her argument, Adimora-Ezeigbo upholds that such nurturing tasks are not alien to women because, naturally, they always seem closest to children.

Among all the areas covered by the researchers above, it is observable that the image of women as exploiters of men in Igboland has not been critically examined. This study, therefore, investigates this image of women in Nsukka-Igbo oral performance and Adichie's novel in the written questioning the need for employment of the image of women as exploiters of men into the texts. In the exploration of the texts, this study will experiment with the "rebel girl" motif of Inyiaama.

Woman as Exploiters of Men in Lejja *Qmaba* Chant

Qmaba Chant or *Egara Qmaba* in Lejja dialect is an all-male-composition and performance displayed in the Nsukka - Igbo extraction. It refers to the half-sung-half-spoken utterances that contain elements of praise for not only *Qmaba* and his qualities but also for his participants. *Qmaba* is an ancestral deity of fertility among the Igbo *Qmaba* socio-cultural group in Enugu State of Nigeria. This chant, which is often ritualistic and sacred, is only heard when *Qmaba* is on earth (*maa nọ n'alā*) in all the Igbo *Qmaba* cultural areas. There are many other variants of *Qmaba* chant performances such as; those performed by an individual for the community during the eves of the deity's Fall and Departure festivals, an individual's chant to *Qmaba* as it passes, and *Qmaba's* chants in praise of itself, and all of them are geared towards the praise of the deity. Embedded in the chants are tropes of stories that depict the exploitative nature of woman in Lejja town. The chant-like stories are seen in the appendix section.

In appendix 1 (story one), the image of the woman as a manipulator of the innocent male persona is observable. The man's innocence is suggested by the fact that it is the woman that presents the offer to him. And the offer is becoming his partner after he had saved her parents from drowning. The male persona agrees to the terms

and performs the heroic role only for the woman to turn around and reject him. The persona's voice is that of disappointment and dejection at the betrayal of the terms of agreement by the woman.

For the woman folk, the portrayal of woman in the story above is negative and derogatory since it is aimed at making the woman appear inferior to men. In other words, the story must come from a patriarchal system which is bent on relegating woman to the background tradition. On the other hand, the men see woman as unreliable. They therefore use the image to depict the feelings of powerlessness, depression, frustration and anxiety men pass through in the hands of woman when it comes to emotional relationships. These feelings are captured in the Lejja proverb analysed by Opatá (1992) which says: "Whom the deity is not killed, is killed by a woman." In Lejja, the analogy between the deity and woman as killers of men connotes stripping one off manhood as already mentioned. The story in the epic chant sounds a cautionary warning note to men on the power of woman; that no matter how financially and socially successful they may be, they are the weaker sex in the face of being controlled by a woman. The persona's anxiety over that mindset is palpable in the story.

Appendix 2 (second story) "*Nẹ Nna nya Eze Agbaa nya Eba*" highlights the power of woman to re-direct a man's destiny. The persona is observed to be manipulated off his royal entitlements because he is carried away by the sexual enticement of woman. The passion and voraciousness that accompany sexual escapades are deployed in the symbolic images of *Ogbonọ soup* and "hot *fufu*," a special delicacy among the Nsukka people. "*Ogbonọ soup*" is symbolic among the Nsukka people of Igbo extraction because it is believed it performs a purgative function. That is why the soup is among the post-natal meals prepared for women. The delicious soup, just as it purges out afterbirth residue in the woman's body, also flushes out the persona's heirloom from him. The persona regrets the loss of his identity and inheritance because of his appetite for sex and woman's affection. Also, the soup's slimy nature makes it stretch and drop when it is eaten, and that is why some other tribes in Nigeria call it "*Draw soup*." The persona uses the image of the soup to represent the alluring power of woman, which is magnetic. He further confirms his powerlessness and perceives himself as a victim of "*Ogbonọ soup*" which represents woman. The infusion of this story in the *Omaba* chant is to warn men of the bitter consequences of being carried away by uncontrolled passion or intersexual relationships. In other words, they should be calculative and careful when being in love. The persona lastly jeers at women by contrasting them with the world of dogs. Among the Lejja people, the dog's image connotes "no permanent residence." The dog, after it has been sold, continues to go back to its former owner's house; therefore, the woman neither belongs to her husband nor her father. If she commits any offence in her husband's house, she is sent back to her father's house. On the other hand, once a woman is married off, her opinion ceases to be sought in her father's house.

Again, in Appendix 3 (story 3), the persona is manipulated into having a sexual intercourse with an unnamed referent. Although the text's persona is non-gendered,

line seven suggests that the seducer is a woman because she asks the man to "*sher tiyi*," which roughly transliterates as "bring it and slot in." The image captured is "something elongated that could be fitted into a hole."

The innocence of the persona is portrayed in the first and second lines: */Nenya jeko nke nye / Q sà nya, nya gata hùma/* *I was going on my own/ and /She told me to come and see/*. The intention of the invitation was not made known to the seduced because he is told to come and see something. He comes only to be manipulated into getting into bed and having sex with the seducer. The persona becomes a victim to the captivating power of the seducer. The story represents the manipulative power of woman and a situation where the woman detours the intention and the destination of the persona.

In the three stories above, the powerful nature of the woman is portrayed with a sense of negativity by the menfolk with the intention of controlling its excesses. In other words, a woman who manifests such characteristics should be handled with extreme caution.

Woman as Exploiters of Men in *Americanah*

Chimamanda Adichie deploys this exploitative image of woman extensively in her novel, *Americanah*, in the exploration of the conflict between feminism and traditional/societal values. Adichie, in contradiction to the menfolk's negative perception of exploitation by the woman, reverses societal ethics by using it positively as a tool of power to depict the heroine, Ifemelu, and other female characters.

Americanah is a replication of the "rebel girl motif" in the Igbo folklore. According to Inyama, (1992), this motif is:

A well-known Ibo folktale which tells about the village girl who is so beautiful and conceited that she will not look at, let alone marry, any of her teeming local admirers. Neither threats nor pleas will make her accept any of the young men around. One day, to her boundless surprise, a very handsome stranger appears in her village, and she falls uncontrollably in love with him. No warnings would make her change her mind about eloping with this seemingly handsome stranger. The fact that no one knows where he has come from, or even that other people feel that there is something uncomfortable or even sinister- in all custom and decorum, she throws caution to the wind and goes with the stranger (109).

Inyama argues that this is the most frequently adapted tale-types by African writers who manipulate the motif to suit their opinions on social trends. Although the major preoccupation of the "rebel girl motif" is the manifestation of nature's revolt for loss of its best products; another very important aspect represented by the motif is the traditional restraint imposed on the female member of society. Based on the conclusions of Inyama, this paper explores *Americanah* in contrast with the latter aspect of the motif, which portrays a conflict between the female character and societal traditional values.

In *Americanah*, Adichie employs exploitation as a survival mechanism for the female folk in their quest for survival, identity and economic empowerment in times

of scarce resources. Exploitation in the novel is portrayed as a positive value because it effects a positive change in the lives of the characters and their close relatives. The novel, in order to achieve its success, represents a negation of the traditional pattern of narration whereby good triumphs over evil. In other words, the cosmopolitan modern values triumph over the traditional values to justify the saying that "the end justifies the means." In *Americanah*, therefore, there is a suggestion that exploitation is an instrument of power which the female folks use to excel and attain their life goals.

Ifemelu, the heroine of the novel, bears the major brunt of male exploitation in the text. She manipulates Obinze's emotions just because he is in love with her. Ifemelu is a character created by Adichie to conflict with the traditional stereotype of women whose priority is to selflessly please their partners. In other words, Ifemelu is Adichie's experimentation of women who are guided by their own volitions and not constrained by the traditional moral standards or expectations from them.

Ifemelu, the only child of her parents, is raised up in Lagos, Nigeria, without any gender restrictions. She socializes with friends, attends school, competes with her male counterparts and mediates in family matters. She is never saddled with such female roles as cleaning the house and cooking. In such a gender-free atmosphere, she is able to create a niche for her future. In other words, based on self-interest she solely decides the relationship partner she picks as well as the character she should exhibit to sustain such a relationship and the university she will attend.

Obinze, Ifemelu's partner in the novel, a professor's son, also shares the same gender-free background with Ifemelu as he cooks and cleans the house and helps out his widowed mother whenever he can. This similar upbringing shared by the two characters suggests the spark that ignited their relationship when they meet. Obinze's mother, who works at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, relocates to Lagos state as a result of the pressure an altercation with a male professor put her in. It is as a result of this movement with her son, Obinze, that fate brings him and Ifemelu together. Obinze's choice for Ifemelu is not because of her beauty because the intention of their classmate, Dasilva, prior to the party which they attended, was to match-make Obinze with the school's beauty queen, Ginika, the half caste. Obinze, however, falls for Ifemelu because of her intelligence and good reading habit. He recalls that, on one occasion, he meets her clutching one of the James Hardy Chase novels. Also, Ifemelu's overwhelming knowledge of proverbs endeared her to Obinze. As a result of this unique display of versatility, Obinze appears glued to Ifemelu, never hurting her feelings and very eager to groom the relationship to marriage. With his advice, Ifemelu leaves for America as a result of the incessant strike of the lecturers in their university. She agrees, on the condition that she would make plans for Obinze to join her as soon as possible. In America, things turn out contrary to Ifemelu's thought and, in the struggle to survive the harsh environment, the flourishing relationship is severed by Ifemelu. All efforts by Obinze to get through to her appear futile.

In the novel, the only times that Ifemelu makes attempts to get in touch with Obinze after the truncated relationship are such times that their classmate, Ranyinudo, gives her updates on Obinze's progresses in life. The first is when he travels to En-

gland, a journey he embarks on with his mother to save him from the devastation of losing Ifemelu as well as an American visa. Ifemelu never thought that Obinze would make that breakthrough in life without her knowledge. Another one is when she gets wind of Obinze's wealth; she immediately starts nursing the dream of coming back to Nigeria where Obinze is. Ifemelu convincingly seems to be battling with two things; the thought that Obinze was getting married and, as Ranyinudo put it, "Meanwhile o he has serious money. See what you missed" (14). And she begins to scheme her way back into Obinze's life even when she knows full well that he is married and has moved on with his life. Another report from Ranyinudo about an encounter with Obinze at the Palms Mall with his daughter that he, "was looking so clean and his daughter is so fine" pushes Ifemelu to send an email to Obinze after five years of break in communication. As she writes to him, she cautiously chooses her words in order to appeal to Obinze's emotions. By calling him "Ceiling," the romantic pet name they started calling each other after an incident in their room at the university, there is the suggestion that she intends to re-ignite the already dead relationship. She writes:

Ceiling, *kedu*? Hope all is well with work and family. Ranyinudo said she ran into you some time ago and that you now have a child! Proud papa. Congratulations. I recently decided to move back to Nigeria. Should be in Lagos in a week. Would love to keep in touch. Take care. Ifemelu. (19)

Just as she envisaged, her diction performs the intended magic because Obinze recollects that before he got married she never addressed him as such. She even called him by his name and verbally flaunted her new acquaintance at him. Consequently, after the emails from Ifemelu have become constant, Obinze's attitude and countenance change towards his wife- Kosi. Kosi, whom Obinze had really fallen in love to fill the gap of Ifemelu in his life, suddenly becomes boring. And everything about her is gradually substituted with constant nostalgic childhood memories of Ifemelu and their university relationship. Obinze already has strong reasons that ought to make him forget the relationship for good, for he thinks that "he could have died during the five-year silence and she would not have known" and she does not sound remorseful when she comes back as "her tone is the same as though she had not wounded him, and left him bleeding for more than five years."

Ifemelu exploits Obinze's weakness for her to her advantage without any compromise about wreaking havoc on an already established family (Obinze, Kosi and their daughter). She manipulates him against his made-up mind to move on with his life and with another woman. She lures him into the world of adultery which is against the Igbo tradition; thereby, killing the man in him, according to Opatá (1992). She also uses Obinze as a cure for her depression as it is stated in the text that she:

hates when Obinze wore relationship so boldly, like a brightly coloured shirt. Sometimes he worried that she was too happy. She would sink into moodiness, and snap at Obinze, or be distant. And her joy would become a restless thing, flapping its wings inside her, as though looking for an opening to fly away (63).

Also in the novel, Nneoma, Obinze's cousin whom he stays with after his deportation from England, is independent and seems well-to-do by the societal standard.

Giving a description of her, the narrator says: "She had thick palmed, capable hands and many business interests. She travelled to Dubai to buy gold, to China to buy woman's clothing, and lately, she had become a distributor for a frozen chicken company" (23). Nneoma reveals the source of her wealth as she plans to introduce Obinze to a chief whom she thinks can help him out of his present predicament. She says to Obinze one day:

I know this very rich man, Chief. The man chased and chased me, eh, hut I refused. He has a serious problem with women and he can give somebody AIDS. But you know, these men, the one woman that says no to them is the one that they don't forget. So from time to time, he will call me and sometimes I go and greet him. He even helped me with capital to start over my business after those children of Satan stole my money last year. He still thinks that one day I will agree to him. *Ha, o di egwu*, for where? I will take you to him. Once he is in a good mood, the man can be very generous. He knows everybody in the country. Maybe he will give us a note for a managing director somewhere (23-24).

This excerpt is quoted at length because it highlights that Nneoma exploits Chief as a result of his doting affection for her. She knows that she is not ready to surrender herself to Chief for sexual satisfaction, yet she sees herself as bait to attract Chief's generosity. She also uses Chief to get connected to highly placed people - a habit that makes her more established in the society. Obinze, her cousin and the hero of the text, also gains from Chief's benevolence. Chief believes that nobody in the country has an honest means of livelihood, as a result of hunger, and he offers Obinze a shady business idea of preparing a proposal for the privatization of the bankrupt National Farm Support Corporation. Obinze shrewdly executes the business plan by following Nneoma's dubious advice to: "undervalue the properties and make it look as if you are following the due process. You acquire the property, sell off half to pay your purchase price and you are in business" (26). Obinze even brings his Caucasian friend and colleague from England to stand in as his general manager. Although Obinze flouts moral values to become wealthy, he gains societal popularity and admiration.

This societal acceptance can be contrasted with the trickster motif where the trickster's mischiefs and dishonest escapades are termed smartness. In other words, Obinze's smartness to fame justifies the Darwinian principle of survival of the fittest in the novel, because he preys on the failed system in his country in order to succeed.

Another character in the novel who exhibits the exploitative role is Aunt Uju, Ifemelu's cousin. Uju is introduced in the novel as the "Thirteen and pimply-faced" girl from the village, whom Ifemelu took to on first sight (53). She has come to the city to live with Ifemelu's family not only to keep Ifemelu company as the only child but also because Ifemelu's father wanted to take up another responsibility since he has just one child. Uju had always had a dream of owning a private clinic in Lagos Island after training as a doctor. Because of this, she refuses to relocate to America like her fellow students who left as a result of incessant strikes by the academic union in her university.

Ifemelu sees Uju's ex-boyfriend, Olujimi, as a "nice-looking and smooth-voiced" young man, who "glistened with quiet polish" (80). But because Uju has a dream which she passionately wants to fulfill, Olujimi lacks the immediate potential to take her to such a height. Uju tells Ifemelu, "I outgrew him." Uju rather falls for a married army "The General," whom she met at a friend's wedding. The General builds a duplex for Uju at Dolphin Estate and, according to her, "the military hospital in Victoria Ireland has no doctor vacancy but The General made them create one for me" (45). Uju does not mince words as she affirms that power is her major attraction in The General. She says: "I did not sleep with him because I wanted something. Ah, this thing called power. I was attracted to him even with his teeth like Dracula" (77). Apparently, Uju... exploits The General's powerful position in the army to attain her life goal and expectations.

Again, among Uju's friends who visit her because she is The General's mistress is Adesuwa. She has a piece of land in Abuja, the capital city, which she got by dating the head of state. Uche, who is also dating a "famously wealthy Hausa man," was bought a boutique in Surulere (82). Uche reveals further: "I told him he must buy it in my name o. Ah, I knew he would not bring the money unless I said somebody was sick. No now, he doesn't know I opened the account" (82).

Uju's ill-gotten wealth and connection make a positive impact in the lives of people around her. Although Ifemelu's father does not support Uju's lifestyle with The General, he cannot reject the crumbs from his largesse. He is unable to pay his house rent for two years after being sacked for not calling his boss "mummy." Uju comes to his rescue after Ifemelu had told her about the landlord's threat of eviction because of the accumulation of unpaid rent. It is stated thus in the novel:

At the flat, Aunt Uju handed Ifemelu's father a plastic bag swollen with cash. "It is rent for two years," she said, with an embarrassed casualness, and then made a joke about the hole in his singlet. She did not look him in the face as she spoke and he did not look her in the face as he thanked her. (79)

By accepting the money from Uju, Ifemelu's father saves himself the shame of being sent back to the village. His life and dignity are restored. Before receiving the money, he was not only sliding into depression as a result of the financial downturn in his life but also because his wife had begun to challenge his authority as a breadwinner of the house. It is pertinent to note that his refusal to be exploited by a woman in his office put him in the present condition. Ifemelu's father, therefore, represents those people in society whose identities are compromised and exploited because of poverty.

Also, Ifemelu's eventual identity is reconstructed by her relocation to the United States, which easily happened because of Uju. The General's sudden death paved the way for the pregnant Uju's impromptu exit to America. The wrath of The General's family appeared unbearable for Uju and she escapes for the safety of her life and that of her unborn child. The movement awakens the need for and facilitates Ifem's travel out of the country. Ifemelu applies for a scholarship in America because Uju is there to host her. Also, Uju, knowing that Ifem's movement to America would relieve her of the burden of taking care of her son, pushes Ifem on to move over. Ifemelu's new

experience and the struggle for survival in the strange land sharpen her perception as she constantly learns from her endeavours.

Ifemelu's mother is so carried away by Uju's new status that she ironically refers to the situation as miraculous. Because of what she enjoys from Uju's escapades with The General, she justifies immoral activities. She shuns calling The General derogatory names like gigolo or flirt but, instead, calls him "Uju's mentor." She prays for him thus:

Heavenly father, I command you to bless Uju's mentor. May his enemies never triumph over him!" Or she would say, "We cover Uju's mentor with the precious blood of Jesus!" and she usually peddles the story that "The General wanted to be a doctor when he was young, and so now he helps doctors. God is really using him in people's lives" (44-45).

She goes to the extent of making the neighbours feel that Uju is lucky to have a man who gives her a car loan. The irony is portrayed in this conversation between Ifemelu and a neighbour;

Chetachi, who lived upstairs, asked Ifemelu, "Your mum said Auntie Uju's mentor also gave her a car loan for the car?"

"Yes!"

"Eh, Auntie Uju is lucky o" (45).

Ifemelu's mum, as depicted above, represents the sycophants of the society who choose to tell lies with shamelessness because of personal benefits.

Another character that exhibits the exploitative influence on man in the novel is Ranyinudo, Ifemelu's secondary school classmate. Ranyinudo is a character in the novel that plays the major role of re-establishing the truncated relationship between the hero, Obinze and Ifemelu, the heroine of the text. She occasionally updates Ifemelu on Obinze's new influential status as well as his financial achievements. It is as a result of her stories that Ifemelu decides to move back to Nigeria to execute her plans of working her way back to Obinze. On their way back, after picking Ifemelu up from the airport, she tells Ifemelu:

And I met someone o. He saw me when I was waiting outside for the mass to end. It was so hot, my foundation was melting on my face and I know I looked like a Zombie, but he still came to me! That's a good sign. I think this one is a serious husband material. Did I tell you that my mother was saying novenas to end my relationship when I was dating Ibrahim? At last she will not have a heart attack with this one. His name is Ndudi. Cool name, abi? You can't get more Igbo than that. And you should have seen his watch! He's into oil. His business card has Nigerian offices (387).

From the excerpt, there are suggestions that Ranyinudo's major intention is to use Ndudi as a launch pad into achieving her societal needs as a woman. Her major interest as depicted is on the material aspect of the man as she had weighed the potential man's pocket from the quality of his watch, oil business and business card. Also,

because of the high possibility of the man being wealthy, she thinks him good enough for marriage. Her interest is certainly not on the man's character but his money. Again, she also tells Ifemelu about Don, another male friend of hers, a married man and a chief executive who buys her business-class tickets to London. Ranyinudo confides in Ifemelu:

I have feelings for him, I won't deny it, but I want to marry him and he knows that. I used to think maybe I should have a child for him but look at Uche Okafor, remember her from Nsukka? She had a child for the managing director of Hale Bank and the man told her to go to hell, that he is not the father, and now she is left with raising a child alone. Na wa (389).

From Ranyinudo's utterance above, it could be deduced that her men only serve the purpose of providing her needs, things that are above her standard in the society. This false personality upgrade which she pursues is also suggested on another occasion where she tells Ifemelu, "I really want Don to change this car. He has been promising for the past three months. I need a jeep. Do you see how terrible the roads are?" (390)

Sister Ibinabo also wields her own exploitative power in the novel. She plays the role of guardian to the youth in Ifemelu's church. She is viewed as so powerful that she lays her hands on visa applications to ensure that they are accepted at the embassy. The novel tells us more about her:

SISTER IBINABO WAS very powerful and because she pretended to wear her power lightly, it only made her more so. The pastor, it was said, did whatever she asked him. It was not clear why; some said she had started the church with him, others that she knows a terrible secret from his past... (50)

Conclusion

The examination of gender exploitation in the two texts, *Qmaba* chant and *Americanah*, reveals that men are the victims of oppression. Also, from the analysis of most female characters in *Americanah*, there is a suggestion that the exploiting image of women against men in the text represents the feminine power to achieve financial break through and personal goals in life. The study thereby validates the claim that female characters are oppressors and the fear of the menfolk against the women's mysterious nature is also justified. The exploiting image of women as used in both texts, therefore, is a precautionary note to men about their affairs with women.

Appendices

Selections from the *Qmaba* chant performed in the *Umuakpo Okiti*, *Umuakpo* Village Square of Lejja town on *Orie* night, July the 17th, 2012. The dialect differs from the standard Igbo version spoken and used in pedagogy.

Appendix 1 (Story 1)

| | | | | |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|----------------------|
| <i>Nẹ Nya Jeko Nye Ije Nye o!</i> | - | - | - | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |
| <i>Nwaanyi shi n'aga ụzọ fàta!</i> | - | - | - | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |

| | | |
|--|---|----------------------|
| <i>Nẹ nya zọfata nne nye nya dārā nye o!</i> | - | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |
| <i>Nẹ nya zọfata nna nya nya dārā nye o</i> | - | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |
| <i>Nẹ nya azọfata nne nye bia je dārā e Ọ ju</i> | - | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |
| <i>Nẹ nya azọfata nna nya bia je dārā e Ọ ju</i> | - | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |
| <i>Jereke--- Jeke o Jereke---Jeke o</i> | - | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |

Transliteration in English

| | | |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| <i>I was going on my own journey o!</i> | - | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |
| <i>A woman came out from the corner of the road</i> | | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |
| <i>If I rescued her mother that I should take her o</i> | | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |
| <i>If I rescued her father that I should take her o</i> | | <i>Jereke---e-Jeke-o</i> |
| <i>I rescued the mother and came to take her and she refused)</i> | | <i>Jereke---e-Jeke-o</i> |
| <i>I rescued the father and came to take her and she refused)</i> | | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |
| <i>Jereke--- Jeke o Jereke---Jeke o</i> | - | <i>Jereke-Jeke-o</i> |

Appendix 2 (Story 2)

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|
| <i>Nẹ Nna Nya Eze Agbaa Nya Eba</i> | - | - | <i>Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke</i> |
| <i>Nẹ oheyi oku anarā nya eba</i> | - | - | <i>Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke</i> |
| <i>Nẹ ụtara oku anarā nya eba</i> | - | - | <i>Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke</i> |
| <i>Uwa ndiom uwa ngata</i> | - | - | <i>Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke</i> |

Transliteration in English

| | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------|
| <i>My Father, the king, has conferred on Me the Royal Rites</i> | | <i>Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke</i> |
| <i>The hot Ọgbono soup has taken my rites from me</i> | - | <i>Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke</i> |
| <i>The hot foo-foo has taken my rites from me</i> | - | <i>Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke</i> |
| <i>The world of woman, the world of dogs</i> | - | <i>Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke</i> |

Appendix 3 (Story 3)

| | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| <i>Ne Nya Jeko Nke Nye</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Nẹ nya jeko nke nye-</i> | - | - | - | - | <i>Hmmm</i> |
| <i>Ọ sà nya, nya gata hụma</i> | - | - | - | - | <i>Hmmm</i> |
| <i>Nẹ nya agar hụma</i> | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|-------------|
| <i>Ọ sà nya nya shueshie ẹkwa nya</i> | - | - | - | - | <i>Hmmm</i> |
| <i>Nẹ nya e shueshie ẹkwa nya</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Ọ sà nya nyigote Ogodo</i> | - | - | - | - | <i>Hmmm</i> |
| <i>Nẹ nya enyigote Ogodo</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Ọ sà nya, nya sher tiyi</i> | - | - | - | - | <i>Hmmm</i> |
| <i>Nẹ nya e sher tiy</i> | | | | | |
| <i>Ọ sà nya nya dkwọ kwọkwọ</i> | - | - | - | - | <i>Hmmm</i> |
| <i>Eee! Nwanyị dkwọ kwọ kwọ</i> | - | - | - | - | |

Transliteration in English

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|------|
| I was going on my own journey | - | - | - | - | Hmmm |
| S/he told me to come and see- | - | - | - | - | Hmmm |
| I went to see | - | - | - | - | Hmmm |
| S/he told me to climb up to the bed | - | - | - | - | Hmmm |
| I climbed up to the bed | - | - | - | - | Hmmm |
| S/he told me to untie my wrapper | - | - | - | - | Hmmm |
| I untied my wrapper | - | - | - | - | Hmmm |
| She told me to put it in | - | - | - | - | Hmmm |
| I put it in | - | - | - | - | Hmmm |
| She said dkwo kwo kwo | | | | | |
| Eee! Woman of dkw kwo kwo | | | | | |

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“Asians in Africa”: Examining the Implications of the “in-between” place and Hyphenated Identities in M. G. Vassanji’s *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*

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Abstract

As a writer of the diaspora, M. G. Vassanji has travelled three continents: Asia, Africa and North America. As a result, he is in the best position to write about homeland, past, memory and identity. The memories and heritage associated with homeland eventually gives identity to the characters. This identity becomes hyphenated over the years post migration. The place of origin provides identity, roots as well as a sense of belonging to an individual. The notion of identity is deeply connected to one’s homeland. Vikram Lall, though has roots in India, establishes tender connections with Nakuru (his birthplace) in Kenya. For him, Kenya is the homeland, whereas for his grand father Anand Lall, his father Ashok Lall and mother Sheila Lall, India is the motherland. The notion of homeland varies for every person and generation. It is only during his self-imposed exile in Canada that Vikram feels a strong longing to return to Kenya. Even though the Indians have made Kenya their home, the Africans do not wholeheartedly accept them. The Asians were not treated fairly and thus were pushed to an in-between position. Vassanji dexterously articulates the predicament of the double migration of his characters. Their displacement, dislocation and the eventual disillusionment finds a comprehensive account in the novel.

Keywords: Memory, Homeland, Identity, In-between, Hyphenated, Ancestral.

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Introduction

Moyez Gulam Hussein Vassanji is an Afro-Asian author who was born in Nairobi, Kenya in 1950 and brought up in Tanzania. He shifted to the USA after having obtained a scholarship and presently he resides in Canada. Vassanji is primarily placed in the diasporic realm as he has vaulted three continents. Therefore, issues related to homeland, past, memory and identity predominantly gain a centre-stage in his novels. The characters ascribe special attachment to their respective homelands. Vijay Mishra writes, “Recalling homelands from a diasporic space is not uncommon among writers of the diaspora” (179). This can certainly be attributed to M. G. Vassanji. In his works the significance of the ancestral place in the lives of the characters can be seen. As the characters are always on the move, it is but natural that the memories of their homeland cling to them dearly.

Summary of the Novel

M. G. Vassanji’s *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2003) won the celebrated Giller Prize for fiction. It is notable to indicate that M. G. Vassanji is the only Canadian writer to have won this award twice. It is a poignant novel of corruption, vulnerability and grief that focuses on the convulsion and mayhem of Kenyan society over the past fifty years. The novel is plentiful in imagery and historical insights and contains an overwhelming story of obsessive betrayals on one side and political carnage mingled with racial tension on the other. The novel begins in 1953, with the eight-year-old Vikram Lall testifying the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. At the same time, the Mau Mau guerrilla war for independence from Britain begins to gain force. In a land torn apart by idealism, scepticism, political upheavals and horrifying acts of violence, Vikram (Vic) and his sister Deepa endeavour to find their place among a new generation in Kenya. Neither colonists nor African, neither white nor black, they find themselves exactly in between in their group of companions: Bill and Annie, children of a British couple, and Njoroge, an African boy. We follow Vic through the changes in the East African society, the enormous promise of the fifties and sixties. Eventually, those hopes come tumbling down. The hideous face of betrayal, corruption and violence gains momentum. Vic is drawn into the Kenyatta government’s course of power-broking. Njoroge, his childhood pal, can neither forsake the charm and belief in his youth nor his pure love for Vic’s sister Deepa. No one could control Mwangi, the gentle gardener and Njoroge’s grandfather, who is the dreaded Mau Mau oath-giver. He is brutally killed by the British. Mahesh Uncle, Vikram’s charismatic uncle, is a surreptitious Mau Mau sympathizer and also a Marxist revolutionary. He is later deported to India by the new African leaders. Njoroge’s idealism ultimately leads to his assassination. Only Vikram ascertains the capricious disposition of the period appropriately and shrewdly refuses to take sides. He desired his place in the middle and scrutinizes events as they occur in quick successions. This is where the title of the novel gains momentum.

Vikram Lall always finds himself “in-between” the relationships both on the personal as well as the political front. He feels himself as a facilitator for Njoroge and

Deepa when they meet each other. Both of them find a trustworthy confidante in Vikram. His married life doesn't last long. Vikram is made the scapegoat of the political storm that sweeps Kenya. Wealth and holdings centred only among the rich and as a result the capitalist model of economy was a sheer failure. He was made to be a part of the lethal game where money changes hands. This covert operation with its ever-widening nexus demanded much caution and discretion on the part of VikramLall. It is enthralling to observe Vikram who is always caught in-between people, politics, family members, situations and events. As a catalyst to a situation or a relationship, he feels smothered and is caught between two worlds. He says, "I didn't believe I was anymore guilty than a hundred others, and I was certainly less guilty than many I could name" (Vikram Lall, 376). Because of the Gemstone Scandal, money started disappearing from the national treasury. Influential and greedy politicians like Paul Nderi manipulated VikramLall because of his Asian-African identity. His own financial investments landed him in the company of the prestigious and powerful Kenyans. He remarks about his plight, "And I the guilty one in the middle, the perilous in-between"(Vikram Lall, 279).

At the end of the story, we find Vikram Lall coming back to Kenya from his exile in Canada with efforts to patch up with the Kenyan Government and to disclose the identity of the people involved in the scams which made him a scapegoat. However, coming out clean is not easy for him. The novel as a bildungsroman is a record of Vikram's life and the circumstances which victimise him.

Focus of the Paper:

This paper predominantly focuses on two main ideas:

1. The past or the homeland of the characters which is the place of "memory". It is the ancestral place of the characters in discussion.
2. The memories and heritage associated with homeland eventually gives identity to the characters. This identity becomes hyphenated over the years post migration. Here, the insinuation of the in-between space is elaborated.

The ideas of homeland and place of birth figure prominently in the novels of the diaspora. For a writer like M. G. Vassanji straddling the three byzantine continents of Asia, Africa and North America, place becomes a strategic issue which he has precisely worked upon. In the contemporary scenario, globalization, transnationalism and multiculturalism have become vital concepts. Citizens today are inclined to shed their parochial and nationalist tendencies in order to adopt a global and a universal outlook. The question then arises as to why the topic of ancestral place or the homeland is given undue attention. The answer, of course, is a veritable part of the question itself as the very word 'ancestral' has links with history, heritage and place. The place of origin provides identity, roots as well as a sense of belonging to an individual. The notion of identity is deeply connected to one's homeland. An individual is assigned with an identity as he is associated to a particular place. The homeland, thus, plays a fundamental role in the formation of identity. The individual's past is essential in determining his present. The characters in Vassanji's novels operate largely

on past and memory. Their ideas of their homeland form a substantial part of the novels. Since they leave their motherland and move elsewhere, they are always anxious of their future in a different country.

Negotiating in-between Place and Hyphenated Identities in the Novel:

Vikram Lall pledges his allegiance to Kenya. As a Hindu – Punjabi (Indian) in particular and an Asian at large, he belongs to the third generation of Indians in Kenya. In a conversation with Njoroge he openly asserts that Nakuru was his home and that he never wanted to return to India:

And would the Asians go home to India? I didn't want to go to India... I knew of no world outside my Nakuru, this home, this backyard, the shopping centre, the school; this town beside the lake of flamingos, under the mysterious Menengai crater where we sometimes went on family picnics, passing the European area on the other side of the tracks. (*The In Between*, 49)

It is indeed remarkable for Vassanji to give a Hindu-Punjabi identity to his protagonist Vikram Lall. His grandfather like many others came to Kenya as an indentured labourer to work on the railways. Since then, the family made Kenya their home. Vikram is particularly attached to Nakuru. He only heard about India from his parents. For him, Nakuru is his home and he is very much close to it. He says quite explicitly,

We have been Africans for three generations, not counting my own children. Family legend has it that one of the rails on the railway line just outside the Nakuru station has engraved upon it my paternal grandfather's name, Anand Lal Peshawari, in Punjabi script- and many another rail of the line has inscribed upon it the name and birthplace of an Indian labourer. (*The In-Between*, 15)

Anand Lal, my dada, stayed on in the new colony after his indentureship, picked Nakuru as the spot where he would live. (*The In-Between*, 16)

Vikram always wondered, “What makes a man leave the land of his birth, the home of those childhood memories that will haunt him till his death-bed?” (17). As his grandfather had made his home in Nakuru, the family stayed there for the successive generations. The involvement and contribution of the indentured labourers from India in Africa has been colossal. Vikram, in fact, pays a gleaming tribute to those labourers in the following passage:

The railway line running from Mombasa to Kampala, proud “Permanent Way” of the British and “Gateway to the African Jewel,” was our claim to the land. Mile upon mile, rail next to thirty-foot rail, fishplate to follow fishplate, it had been laid by my grandfather and his fellow Punjabi labourers-JumaMolabux, Ungan Singh, Muzzafar Khan, Shyam Sunder Lal, Roshan, Tony – the cast of characters in his tales was endless and of biblical variety – recruited from an assortment of towns in northwest India and brought to an alien, beautiful, and wild country at the dawn of the twentieth century. Our people had sweated on it, had died on it: they had been carried away in their weary sleep or even wide awake by man-eating lions of magical ferocity and cunning...

(*The In-Between*, 15)

In *The Gunny Sack* too there is a reference to the railway line construction by Indians. Dhanji Govindji narrates to JiBai his adventures to the innermost parts of the African continent as a part of his search for his half-caste son Huseni.

The railway goes all the way to the lake in the interior, and everywhere the train stops there is an Indian settlement. The line was built by our Indians, every station master is an Indian and every conductor is also one of us. Our people are doing well under the British, Bai. (*The Gunny*, 35)

Even though the Indians have made Kenya their home, the Africans do not wholeheartedly accept them. When Mwangi, Njoroge's grandfather and the family's gardener asked Vikram's mother why the Indians have been delaying going back to their homes in India since they have made enormous fortune in Africa, she retorted, "But they don't want to go, it's been a long time, Mother told him. This is their land too now, where their children and grandchildren were born. Isn't that true?" (106) In the same way, Paul Nderi, the Transport Minister and also Vikram's boss comments cynically about the Indians, "you people have your feet planted in both countries, and when one place gets too hot for you, you flee to the other" (314). In response to the minister's disrespect for the Asians, Vikram contradicted, "It's rather that "we people" as you call us, don't have a place anywhere, not even where we call home" (314). This riposte by Vikram fittingly reiterates the dilemma of the Asians in Africa. There is no such thing as permanent home for the Asians who are considered as in-between by the Africans.

Vikram's mother had visited her homeland India twice since her father's death. Now she believed that "India was calling her, that she was ready to end her African sojourn and return finally home" (315). For her, getting back to her homeland would provide ultimate solace and peace. Allon Gal, Athena S. Leoussi, Anthony D. Smith write about this condition in the introduction of their book *The Call of the Homeland: Diaspora Nationalisms, Past and Present*:

The similarities and differences between the host country and the diaspora's homeland are also relevant and important: frequently, the greater the contrast between the modernity of the host country and relative backwardness and conservatism of the country of origin, the weaker the attachment. By the same token, when the homeland is relatively developed and dynamic, and somehow attuned to the emigrants' destination, the diaspora tends to consistently sustain the homeland and cherish its call. (Gal et.al. xv)

Vikram Lall's mother is shown as a typical Hindu-Punjabi Indian woman who decorated her room with idols of Indian gods and goddesses. She was resolute in opposing Deepa's decision to marry Njoroge voicing resolutely that inter-racial marriage is not an Indian custom. Even in Africa, Vikram's mother endeavoured to keep their traditional customs thriving. Gijsbert Oonk notes about the people of South Asian origin in diaspora:

They may want their children to prosper in their adopted countries, but at the same time they may prefer them to adopt Indian family values, marry other

Indians, and share their common culture. In other words, many South Asians living overseas tend to reproduce their Indian culture, values, language and religion as much as possible. (Oonk, 9)

Sarcastically, in the end of the novel we see that Vikram's father (after his wife's death) lives in with his African mistress. The novel portrays Vikram's childhood in detail. He evokes the family gatherings every Sunday, when topics of mythology, politics, sports, trade and commerce would be debated with genuine and sincere interest. In the present when he is in Canada, he tenderly recalls "Nakuru, the place of my childhood" (303) and it was there during his childhood that he spent those happy moments which now are a part of memory, "...and we were all alive and the world was wonderful" (45). There are obvious references to the ancestral places of Vikram Lall's parents. The feeling of exile experienced by his mother and his uncle are also elaborated in the novel. Vikram's mother encounters a sense of exile as her homeland is lost to Pakistan.

When Rama's exile was the subject of the stories, it was never far from our consciousness that Mother and her brother shared a deep sense of exile from their birthplace, Peshawar, a city they would never be able to see again because it had been lost to Pakistan. And since Peshawar was the ancestral home also of my dada Anand Lal, the rest of our family could somehow share in that exile, though not with the same intensity. (*The In-Between*, 85)

Vikram takes pride in his "Nairobi Punjabi Hindu" (221). Years later, the family moved to Nairobi for widening their horizons in education and business. India, however, "was always fantasyland" (19) to him. Members of the first generation of migrants have a greater affinity towards their homeland. Gijsbert Oonk explains how migrants' sense of belonging in a multicultural location has various implications.

The diaspora as a *type of consciousness* emphasizes the variety of experiences, a state of mind and a sense of identity. This is described as *dual or paradoxical nature*. This nature has various connotations. First, it refers to the experience of discrimination and exclusion, and at the same time, the positive identification with the highly praised historical heritage of the Indian civilisation. Second, the awareness of multi-locality, the notion of belonging 'here' and 'there' as well as sharing the same 'roots' and 'routes'. The awareness of the ability to make a connection here and there, making the bridge between the local and the global. Third, double consciousness creates a 'triple consciousness', that is, the awareness of the double consciousness and being able to use it instrumentally. In addition to the identification with the host society, and the homeland, there is the identification with the locality, especially in the discourse of multiculturalism. (Oonk, 18)

Vikram Lall belonged to Kenya and had an identity there. The identity is a hyphenated one. He is an Afro-Asian who follows Hinduism. In a meeting with Lieutenant Soames, he declared and upheld his Kenyan citizenship zealously, "I said I was a Kenya citizen and currently studying in Dar es Salaam" (235). In a letter to Mzee Kenyatta requesting a personal favour, seeking permission for Mahesh Uncle to

enter Kenya as a permanent resident, Vikram makes a direct reference about his ancestor's service to the nation, "Your Excellency may not be aware, I wrote, that my family's service to the nation did not begin with me. I informed him that my grand father had worked on the construction of the railways" (307).

As a matter of fact, Part 4 of *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* is circumspectly titled 'Homecoming'. As soon as Vic lands in Nairobi, he sensed that, "There is something immeasurably familiar in the cool Nairobi night that tells you, you are home, that for better or worse, this is where you belong" (382). Once when his father stated that they could also have joined the emigration rush to England after independence, Vikram replied, "We stayed because this is our country. And Mother would have gone to India, not England – you know that" (384). Here again, Vikram endorsed his Kenyan national identity apart from being a Hindu-Punjabi with roots in India. R. Radhakrishnan mentions that "the diasporic location is the space of the hyphen that tries to coordinate, within an evolving relationship, the identity politics of one's place of origin with that of one's present home." (Radhakrishnan, xiii)

In Korrenburg, Canada, he feels alienated and detached though he feels that it is a "calm retreat" (371). Here, he gets plentiful time to ruminate and to come up with a plan to get back to Kenya. It is going back to Kenya – his homeland that is foremost on his mind. Seema Chatterjee, his friend in Canada asked him if he "unwillingly, unwittingly" belonged to that place i.e. Korrenburg, Vikram doubtfully asks himself, "Can I too learn to belong here?" (370) He immediately wanted to return to Kenya and settle things with the government and to come out clean.

Do I belong here – in this wonderful country where the seasons are orderly, days go past smoothly one after another? This cold moderation should after all be conducive to my dispassion? No. I feel strongly the stir of the forest inside me; I hear the call of the red earth, and the silent plains of the Rift Valley through which runs the railway that my people built and the bustle of River Road; I long for the harsh familiar caress of the hot sun. (*The In-Between*, 371)

This same feeling resounds in an essay titled "Canada and Me: Finding Ourselves" by Vassanji. He is compellingly attached to Africa as he has his roots there. Of course, one cannot forget the place where he/she has childhood memories. As a young boy he used to go along with his mother for shopping and realized the struggles that a young widowed mother faced. He writes of his days in Africa where he spent his happy childhood:

I remain strongly attached to Africa, the continent of my birth; its music, the sight of its grasslands, its red earth, or its mighty Kilimanjaro, stir me to the core. I have happy memories of my childhood there. (Vassanji, 20-21)

Vassanji dexterously articulates the predicament of the double migration of his characters. Their displacement, dislocation and the eventual disillusionment finds a comprehensive account in his works. One is left to ponder about the far-reaching effects of migration on the characters. Amin Malak observes,

What distinguishes M. G. Vassanji's work from that of other Canadian writers is its vibrant, affectionate depiction of the double migration of his South Asian

characters. These mainly Indian Muslims of the esoteric Shamsi sect make their first voyage to East Africa in the late nineteenth century as part of the labour mobility within the British empire, working as semi-skilled labourers, small traders, and junior colonial functionaries. As such, they are installed as a buffer zone between the indigenous Africans and the colonial administration. (Malak, 182-183)

Conclusion

Vassanji interrogates his own community's history in his works. He writes at length about the Gujarati traders who migrated to Africa in the late 19th century. Africa and America are the background for his portrayal of Indian lives. Though he migrated to Canada from the United States, his emotional bonding with Africa is unequivocally truthful. A sense of identity and nostalgia about one's homeland has always been exhibited in the writings of the Indian diaspora. Writing from a hyphenated space M. G. Vassanji illustrates that multicultural identities constantly get ripped apart with respect to their language, class, race and gender differences. These disparities get transmuted and reconfigured in the trans-local spaces. The notions of homeland i.e. the places of memory are remembered over and over again. Consequently, the emotional, political and cultural affiliations of the characters become inextricably linked to their identities.

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What's its Name? Dealing with Monstrous Identities in Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*

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Abstract

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, originally published in Arabic in 2013 and translated into English by Jonathan Wright in 2018, is set in the chaotic socio-political condition of post-invasion Iraq. The Nobel exacerbates the horror of sectarian violence by introducing a Frankensteinian atmosphere of magical realism. However, this paper concentrates on the concept of monstrosity as presented in the novel. The paper shows how the concept of monstrosity, being a fluid one, problematizes the notion of identity. By carefully considering the multiple manifestations of 'monstrous identity', the paper demonstrates that 'monstrosity' is not an easily identifiable physical attribute found in conventional deformed-body 'monsters'; nor is it just a characteristic trait of an evil mind; rather, it is a highly nuanced term which complexly affects social identities.

Keywords: Monstrosity, Identity, Society, Post-invasion Iraq, Body.

Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* is set in uricide-affected Baghdad of post-invasion Iraq. Through the use of magic realism, he depicts an Iraq where explosions are part of daily life; where, those who step out of their houses cannot avoid the sight of blood and scattered body parts on roads; where car-bomb explosions are regular events. This paper examines the concept of monstrosity as presented in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. The paper draws on various established ideas of monstrosity and shows how the author presents 'monstrosity' as an unstable, fluid concept, which problematizes the notion of identity. By blurring the human/monster binary, the novel warns the readers against making hasty moral judgments. Moreover, by carefully considering the multiple manifestations of 'monstrous identity', the paper shows that 'monstrosity' is not an easily identifiable physical attribute found in

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conventional deformed-body 'monsters'; nor is it just a characteristic trait of an evil mind; rather, it is a highly nuanced term which complexly affects social identities.

People have been curious about monsters since time immemorial. Speculations about the existence of monstrous races go back to Old English *Beowulf* and Medieval Arthurian romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Shakespeare has also dealt with various forms of monstrosity in his plays. From *A Midsummer Night's dream* where Puck worries that his "mistress with a monster is in love" (3.2.6-7) to *The Tempest's* Caliban; from *Macbeth's* witches to the "civil monster" (4.1.64) of *Othello*, from *Love's Labours Lost's* "monster ignorance" (4.2.23) to Lear's confrontation with the "monster ingratitude" (1.5.40) in *King Lear* – every time 'monstrosity' has received a new definition in Shakespeare's plays. As Simona Dragan puts it:

Theoretically, monstrosity is defined and perceived by people as an extreme form of abnormality, either physical or mental, and, particularly, as a single or multiple manifestation of deformities or infirmities that can be either innate, or developed, or imagined, or indicative of obvious forms of degeneration. (1)

At present, connotation-wise, the term 'monster' has moved a long way from what it was in earlier times. Today's monsters no more represent a failure of divine creation. Rather, it has emerged as an umbrella term bringing diverse identities together.

One of the most important literary works to take monstrosity to a different level and compel the readers to sympathize with the so-called 'monster' was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; Or, The Modern Prometheus*. The Promethean scientist hero, Victor Frankenstein's irresponsible decision to abandon his creature to the cruelties of society turned the innocent creature into a veritable 'monster.' Taking cue from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Ahmed Saadawi, an Iraqi author, journalist and documentary maker, crafted his novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad*. As pertinently pointed out by Ola Abdalkafor, "*Frankenstein in Baghdad* is the first Arabic novel that has borrowed the Frankenstein element to address issues related to Iraq, presenting a Frankenstein-like monster to show the consequences of the American military intervention and the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, which resulted in a form of man-made monstrosity" (1). Perturbed by the fact that the pieces of corpses of the victims of suicide bombings and sectarian violence in Baghdad never receive a decent burial, Hadi Al-Attag, a junk dealer, decides to literally stitch together the pieces to form a composite whole so that it "wouldn't be treated as rubbish" (Saadawi 25) and can be given a proper burial. It is to be carefully noted that Hadi, unlike Victor Frankenstein, never intended to create a living human being. His real intention was to craft a composite corpse ultimately to bury it properly. But contrary to his intentions, a lost soul, the soul of Hasib, a hotel guard killed recently in a bombing attack, takes refuge in the soulless body, which Hadi calls *shesma* or Whatsitsname.

Simona Dragan in her paper, "Abnormality, Deformity, Monstrosity: Body Transgressions in Contemporary Visual Culture," claims:

Most often, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic monstrosity were projected by humans at a certain distance, considering that monsters could be found mostly in the tales of travellers to distant lands (and invariably amplified and increased by the people's imagination). This physical presence of the monster 'far away from here' also indicated his or her moral and cognitive otherness: everything that people could not understand or assimilate, just like everything that did not fit their commonsensical morality, was usually connected to various transgressive practices or was projected by people outside their worlds. (2)

However, Saadawi breaks the convention by placing Whatsitsname among us, amid the chaos of post-invasion Iraq. The author exacerbates the terror by making his readers realize that if Whatsitsname is a monster, he is not a far away creature, but rather, a very real constant presence among us. Now, the question is, whether Whatsitsname can justifiably be called a monster. As Hadi describes:

Whatsitsname was made up of the parts of people who had been killed, plus the soul of another victim, and had been given the name of yet another victim. He was a composite of victims seeking to avenge their deaths so they could rest in peace. He was created to obtain revenge on their behalf. (Saadawi 125)

Thus, the idea of monstrosity here gets problematized. Being a "composite of victims" (Saadawi 125), his acts of apparent cruelty bring justice to the victims whose body-parts make-up his body. He is Criminal X for people like Brigadier Sorour Mohamed Majid, the head of the mysterious Tracking and Pursuit Department, who cannot understand the logic of Whatsitsname's monstrous cruelty. As has aptly been pointed out by Dwight Garner in "In Frankenstein in Baghdad," a Fantastical Manifestation of War's Cruelties, "Saadawi's creature feels he is misunderstood. He's not a bad man, he wishes to explain" (para. 11) and in an attempt to explain himself, Whatsitsname records everything he has to say about himself in a recorder and sends it to Mahmoud al-Sawadi, a young journalist at al-Haqiqa. He himself says, "They have turned me into a criminal and a monster, and in this way they have equated me with those I seek to exact revenge on" (Saadawi 136). Rebecca Merkelbach in "Monster Theory and the Study of Monstrosity in the Íslendingasögur" opines that monstrosity should not always be associated with physically hybrid or paranormal creatures (3). Rather, whatever disrupts or transgresses the social norm, itself becomes monstrous in the eyes of the society. In a similar way, Whatsitsname's acts to seek justice for the victims turns him into a social transgressor and, therefore, a monster and a criminal, in the eyes of the so-called protectors of society.

"The social and the monstrous . . . are not mutually exclusive; in fact, the one depends on the other" (3), states Merkelbach quite significantly in "Monster Theory and the Study of Monstrosity in the Íslendingasögur". Truly, in Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the society gives birth to the 'monster' – Whatsitsname. A product of the frenzied socio-political conditions of post-invasion Iraq, Whatsitsname's initial goal of life – to avenge the victims, whose body-parts have made him – was also defined by the ailing society. Moreover, the way French Revolution was considered to be monstrous by Mary Shelley's parents, in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the revolutionary acts of Whatsitsname are also seen to be monstrous. "Almost every

aspect of the French Revolution discloses monstrosities, according to the writings of Edmund Burke" (1), wrote Botting in "Frankenstein and the Language of Monstrosity". Whenever the masses try to resist authority, their actions are labeled monstrous. Thus, these society-bred 'monsters' suffer the burden of multiple conflicting identities. In this context, we are reminded of Julia Kristeva's concept of the Abject. According to Kristeva, Abject "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 3). Whatsitsname, in this novel, appears to be the disturbance incarnate. His complex identity signifies a mysterious source of terror, or, to use Kristeva's words, "that conglomerate of fear, deprivation, and nameless frustration, which, properly speaking, belongs to the unnameable" (Kristeva 35). However, as he himself reveals in his recordings, Whatsitsname, unlike Shelley's monster, who was shunned both by his creator and the society, has a large number of followers. Therefore, he is at once Criminal X for a part of the society and "the model citizen" (Saadawi 140) for others. According to his follower, the young madman:

Because I'm made up of body parts of people from diverse backgrounds – ethnicities, tribes, races and social classes – I represent the impossible mix that never was achieved in the past. I'm the first true Iraqi citizen . . . (Saadawi 140).

Another follower, the old madman thinks that Whatsitsname is "an instrument of mass destruction that presages the coming of the savior that all the world's religions have predicted . . . the one who will annihilate people who have lost their way and gone astray" (Saadawi 140). He believes that by helping Whatsitsname in his mission, he is actually facilitating the advent of the savior for whom the whole world is anticipating. Whatsitsname's another follower, the eldest madman believes him to be the "saviour" (Saadawi 140). Thus, while a part of the society abhors Whatsitsname for his 'monstrosity', another part of the same society glorifies and almost reveres him for those same actions. Ironically, those who are on his side are termed as 'madmen', thereby articulating the common belief that a sane person should abide by the rules and regulations of the society; whoever dares to transgress social norms is labeled insane or mad.

However, Whatsitsname, at one point of time, is compelled to transgress his own law. As has already been mentioned before, his body was a composite of different parts of various victims and his goal was to avenge those persons whose body-parts have made up his body. But whenever he avenged someone, he lost that particular part of his body, which belonged to that person. Therefore, to continue his mission and stay alive, he needed a constant supply of body-parts. Whatsitsname determined that he would only use victim-flesh to repair his body-parts. But soon, he realized:

My list of people to seek revenge on grew longer as my old body parts fell off and my assistants added parts from my new victims... under these circumstances I would face an open-ended list of targets that would never end. (Saadawi 146-147)

At one point of time, he realizes that the flesh used by his assistants to amend his body and keep him alive does not always come from innocent victims. He comes to know

from the magician, one of his assistants, that now half of his body was made up of criminal flesh. Realizing the concern of Whatsitsname, the magician says:

Each of us has a measure of criminality . . . Someone who's been killed through no fault of his own might be innocent today, but he might have been a criminal ten years ago, when he threw his wife out onto the street, or put his ageing mother in an old people's home, or disconnected the water or electricity to a house with a sick child, who died as a result or so on. (Saadawi 149)

Therefore, criminality and its resultant monstrosity is not a fixed concept, rather a fluid one. Margrit Shildrick quite appropriately states:

In place of a morality of principles and rules that speaks to a clear-cut set of binaries setting out the good and the evil, the self and the other, normal and abnormal, the permissible and the prohibited, I turn away from such normative ethics to embrace instead the ambiguity and unpredictability of an openness towards the monstrous other [...] to contest the binary that opposes the monstrous to the normal (qtd. in Merkelbach, *The Monster Theory* 4).

However, the magician's rationalization boosts Whatsitsname's self-assurance and he starts killing people at random to ensure an uninterrupted supply of new body-parts.

In this novel, the concept of monstrosity is more nuanced than the conventional representations of it in earlier literary works. Initially, there is the American power, which is responsible for initiating all the trouble. Backed by this superpower are national authorities like The Tracking and Pursuit Department, who never prioritize the interests of Iraqi people. As revealed by Saidi to Mahmoud, Brigadier Majid of The Tracking and Pursuit Department was employed by the Americans Coalition Provisional Authority to spread violence among the Iraqi people in the name of controlling them. He claims:

. . . for a year or more he's been carrying out the policy of the American ambassador to create an equilibrium of violence on the streets between the Sunni and Shiite militias, so there'll be a balance later at the negotiating table to make new political arrangements in Iraq. The American Army is unable or unwilling to stop the violence, so at least a balance or an equivalence of violence has to be created. Without it, there won't be a successful political process. (Saadawi 170)

If the monstrous cruelty of the American forces is responsible for the birth of Whatsitsname, the failure of national authorities of post-invasion Iraq to ascertain security and peace is equally responsible for its existence. Therefore, in *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, multiple facets of monstrosity become evident. When criminal flesh contaminates Whatsitsname's composite body, and he deviates from his initial aim of seeking justice for the victims whose body-parts have contributed in his existence, he becomes a symbol of the then social condition of Iraq, where everyone kills everyone. Khaled Hroub in his article "International Prize for Arabic Fiction 2014: *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, Beyond Good and Evil", quite significantly opines:

Saadawi's *Frankenstein* monster is a deadly creature of legend that has many fathers: the Iraqis and their religious denominations, terrorist organisations of

all kinds, the Americans and the West, the Arabs and Iran. Each claims it is the others who are to blame for the brutality, the bloodshed and the killing, each washes his hands clean of all sin. Shesma, however, lives among them, sleeps in their houses and looks very much like them until they finally chase him out of town. All of them hate the ugly monster, but none are willing to admit that they too had a hand in creating and protecting it. (qtd. in Abdalkafor 12-13)

What becomes evident is that monstrosity is not physical; rather, it is an attribute developed by one's interactions with the society. Quite rightly does Rebecca Merkelbach in "The Monster in Me: Social Corruption and the Perception of Monstrosity in the Sagas of Icelanders" raise the question, "If a monster is lurking and there is no one to be threatened by it, is it a monster?" (23).

In Mary Shelley's novel, the creator, Victor Frankenstein, abandoned the monster. But in *Frankenstein in Baghdad* Whatsitsname himself abandons his creator Hadi after Hasib's spirit enters the composite corpse. Although the sequence of events differs, the creature's hatred for the creator is similar in both the novels. Like Victor Frankenstein's 'hideous progeny', Whatsitsname also believes that his creator is responsible for all his misfortune. In his first encounter with his 'father', Whatsitsname says:

You're responsible for the death of the guard at the hotel, Hasib Mohamed Jaafar . . . If you hadn't been walking past the hotel – the guard wouldn't have come close to the gate. He might have stayed close to the sentry box, which was relatively far from the outer gate, and opened fire from a distance on the suicide bomber driving the rubbish truck. The explosion might have caused him some injuries, or the blast might have thrown him, but he definitely wouldn't have died, and the next morning he could have gone home to his wife and his little daughter. (Saadawi 122)

When Haditries to remind him that he is his 'father', it was he who has brought him to existence, and for that he should be grateful towards him, Whatsitsname asserts:

You're just a conduit Hadi . . . Think how many stupid mothers and fathers have produced geniuses and great men in history. The credit isn't due to them but to circumstances and other things beyond their control. You're just an instrument, or a surgical glove that Fate put on its hands to move pawns on the chessboard of life. (Saadawi 123)

Time and again, Whatsitsname punishes his creator, Hadi al-Attag, for bringing him to existence and making him live a monstrous life. On the other hand, when the officers of The Traffic and Pursuit Department fail to arrest Criminal X, they start torturing Hadi, to coerce him into falsely confessing his being Criminal X, knowing well that "this scrawny old man wouldn't be agile enough to run or put up much of a fight" (Saadawi 181). Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* here reminds us of the incident when Victor Frankenstein was taken into custody for the alleged murder of his childhood friend Clerval. In both cases, the 'creator' is suspected of being the perpetrator of crimes committed by the 'creation'. However, towards the end of the novel, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, the security commanders fail to arrest Criminal X;

instead, the person arrested by them, whom they claim to be Criminal X, actually turns out to be Hadi al-Attag, whose face, at present, completely disfigured by another blast, resembles Whatsitsname's. It is quite interesting to note that while Victor's 'hideous progeny' was his alter ego in Shelley's novel, here Hadi, the creator becomes a distorted mirror image of Whatsitsname, his creation. Hadi, the creator, is now compelled to bear the 'monstrous identity' of his creation by the same society and law, which had earlier ascribed Whatsitsname with the identity of a 'monster'.

The novel ends with the image of people rejoicing over the capturing of the 'monster', who, as the readers ironically know, is actually Hadi. But, there is also the image of a mysterious man watching over:

The spectre of an unknown man also lingered there, standing for the past hour at the glassless window of a third-floor room, silently watching the people celebrate, smoking and looking every now and then at the dark clouds overhead. (Saadawi 272)

This might be Whatsitsname, but we cannot say that for sure. Rather, what is evident is that society and its law has failed to control the 'monster' and therefore, monstrosity will continue. Monstrosity is pervasive. People will go on killing each other in the name of achieving justice, as the ideas of justice and criminality are complexly entangled in post-war Iraq. Quite pertinently does Abdalkafor question:

Who is the lawful and who is the lawless? Whose version of justice is the valid one; the American military's, Shesma's, Iraqis' - Shiite, Sunni, Kurd? None of these? (14)

In the chaotic socio-political condition of post-invasion Iraq, the binary between Humanity and monstrosity has been blurred.

Saadawi's novel, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, thus, introduces a complex idea of 'monstrous identity'. An exhibition of various manifestations of monstrosity shatters our conventional ideas. That monstrosity is neither entirely physical, nor entirely intrinsic, nor entirely social, but rather a complex mixture of all these and probably much more, is in non-conformity with the traditional ideas of monstrosity. Whatsitsname, being a composite body, represents every religion and sect, and, therefore, attributing the identity of 'monster' to him implies that monstrosity is ubiquitous, irrespective of one's religious or sectarian identity. Moreover, the co-existence of innocent and criminal flesh in a single body – the body of Whatsitsname, the 'monster' – signifies social corruption. The confusion regarding the 'monstrous identities' of Hadi and Whatsitsname warns the readers against making hasty moral judgments. Instead of a traditional conclusion where getting rid of the monster establishes peace and order in the society, *Frankenstein in Baghdad* incites the readers to question the very justifiability of the term 'monster'. The novel, set in a Frankensteinian atmosphere of gloom and terror, reveals that monsters are at once apart from and a part of one's self. Infact, when considered as Other, it remains complexly entangled with the Self. Scrutinizing the various aspects of monstrous identity, as revealed in this novel, we can conclude that Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* has redefined monstrosity.

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The Conflict Between Traditional and Modern Awareness in Anita Desai's *Voices in the City*

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Abstract

In modern times, joint families are breaking up and sense of brotherhood among people is fading away. The result increases feeling of loneliness, alienation and selfishness among individuals. These are a few evils of our modern world. Novels of Anita Desai have the glimpses of tradition and modernity between which the Indian society is swinging. The Indian woman now presents herself at a new threshold, different from middle age. She is now a developed woman, competent and worldly, but when she sees her shadow, she identifies it with a stranger's face. She is not that woman who had waited in her dreams. What she looks, is a worldly woman bound with chains and shackles. These chains and shackles are the traditions which had made her to accept the compulsion of the given roles that she had never integrated into her personhood. She had been a daughter-in-law, wife and mother but not herself.

Keywords: Alienation, Tradition, Modernity, Middle age, Personhood.

Indian traditions are famous worldwide. They are the backbone of our society. Tradition has ramified meaning. It can be an idea, a practice, a belief coming down to us from generations. Sometimes they tend to be social, sometimes spiritual and moral and at the other time they encompass some blind faith or dogma.

Indians are famous for their tolerance. Their capacity to submit themselves to the fate, gives them power to face all calamity. Another quality of Indian tradition is that the society welcomes every person of any religion and of any country and even absorbs them in its fold, while in the western society, any outsider is looked down upon as a second citizen. In India, there is a joint-family system, in which people live together harmoniously shedding of their respective egos.

Apart from these commendable parts, some bad practices have crept into our social system, i.e. blind faiths or dogmas. Another malpractice in our tradition is the old fashioned *Zamindari* system, which creates a painful yawn of superiority and inferiority between individuals.

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Our ancient books and scriptures i.e, the *Ramayana* and the like, are constant source of inspiration of our society and they constantly remind of how a person should behave in a certain situation. These rules are part and parcel of our own tradition. Most of the rules are moral in nature. This heavy yoke of morality has been foisted upon Indian woman rather than the Indian man.

Tradition says that a woman should regard her husband as her master (Nowhere in the entire world can we find such relationship of a master and servant between two sexes). She should submit to his wishes always – be it a matter of sex or any other matter. Many Indian festivals have come down to us in the form of traditions. A Perfect Indian woman is expected to keep fasts for the long life of her husband on the festivals like ‘*Karwachauth*’ or ‘*Vat Savitri Vrata*’. All such customs are perhaps to buckle down woman, while man is totally free from all such restrictions. Though there are some rules laid down for the men also, yet these are seldom given heed to or observed.

On the other hand, modernity can be a state of mind where one rejects old dogmas and faith. Present day’s social traditions are somehow more or less under the western influence. In the modern world of industrial growth people have developed a flexible bent of mind. They do not follow traditions with blind faith but test them on the touchstone of their reasoning. Women specially have questioned the routine roles attributed to them – of motherhood, of wifehood, etc. They do not want themselves to get fixed into any type of rigid slot. Realizing one’s individuality is modernism on mental level, Indian men on their part have started treating woman as an individual and his partner.

After a large psychic travel, some women have arrived at this new threshold. The soul of woman is tensile, and resilient, having travelled through the endless and arid wastes of social and psychological space. In this process she has attempted to search the completeness of the self which is a spirit of human existence. Every society and culture has some women who have crossed this threshold and ascertained a place. These women are the pioneers who add something more wholesome and dignified and graceful than before.

Novels of Anita Desai have the glimpses of tradition and modernity between which the Indian society swings. Basically, the protagonists of Anita Desai appear with tragedy. They are weak characters, they fail to overpower their surroundings and overthrow their familiar terms and society. They seem psychologically disturbed, melancholic, self-centered and hesitated in their manners and expression. They do not have the determination and power of will to pursue a definite line of action. They are introvert characters, temporarily fallen into a state of obsessiveness of sensation in which again the association of ideas is not directed and controlled by a sense for conduct. The novelist justifies her selection of solitary and introspective characters in the following words:

Well, I think, solitary and introspective people are always very aware of living on the brink. I suppose every one of us is in a sense of aware of living on the brink. Anyone of us might one day have an experience which may push one

over, but perhaps my introspective characters are more aware than others are of what lies on the other side. (Desai 1987:10)

In Anita Desai's novels, the characters create their own private world and restrain it with wonder, sublimity or evil figures. A critical study of her novels reminds of Jung's observation and affirms the fact that the activation of fantasies is "a process that occurs when consciousness finds itself in a critical situation." (Jung 22)

Anita Desai's protagonists, in their phrase of alienation, distress and fantasy play three major acts of escape, of consolation and a moral and psychological support.

In *Voices in the City*, Monisha does not have evident notion of her emotional needs and enjoys her intellectual self. She lives in the world of imagination and is totally disregarded of middle class values and traditions. Her incapability to adjust with her in-laws, marital distress with Jiban and her search for meaningful human relationship, at times, lead to mysterious thoughts. She identifies her superiority over her surroundings. Her collection of books instead of saris in the almirah resembles the much needed feeling of importance. The mysterious attitude horrifies Kalyanidi, but Monisha gets a vicarious pleasure by thinking. "I see, that of course she cannot know that there is nothing to laugh at in Kafka and Hopkins or Dostoyevsky or my Russian or French or Sanskrit dictionaries." (116)

Monisha is in need of an image for herself. She is fond of reading many famous writers' works. But this attempt of wish fulfilment results in losing consciousness of her real identity. Her desire for supremacy and privacy of the self does not let her comprehend the actual external reality. The outer world seems to her like a stage and she identifies herself as an actress, playing different roles according to the need of her situation. Her ideas are originated spontaneously in response to her conscious and unconscious emotions and feelings.

Monisha's extreme interest in fantasy reveals her fascination for darkness between the stars, which she signifies as merely things on earth that can comfort:

... me rub a balm into my wounds, into my throbbing head, and bring me this coolness, this stillness, this interval of peace. Sleep has nightmares. This empty darkness has not so much as a fantasy dream. It is one until waste, a desert to which my heart truly belongs. (138)

Such notions express Monisha's inner struggle against loneliness, depression and her fear of harsh reality of life.

The younger sister of Monisha, Amla, is the main attraction of this novel. At the beginning, Amla has excited notions about Calcutta but later she signifies that there is no charm and pleasure in this city. Psychologically, she is a wise personality of a rebellious young woman and she is curious to govern her life and wants to triumph over every obstacle. Her ambitiousness enforces her through different psychic values till she achieves her real identity. Amla's representation into a spontaneous woman denotes her developing capability. Monisha's suicide reveals to her the tragedy of the lost self. But Amla realizes as she would not allow herself to get lost like her sister, "she knew that Monisha's death has pointed the way for her and would never allow her to lose herself" (248). Monisha's death becomes the beginning point of her

awakening. This accident ultimately provides her with the appropriate views of reality. Through these views she becomes bewildered and identifies with self-idealization.

The inequality in Amla's idealized personality and reality reflect her two tendencies – the regression and the progression. Her attitude expresses her inner conflicts and need of the external support to develop. Due to unhappiness at home, erotic instincts develop in her. She continuously needs enlargement from others to compensate her essential desires with her imposing self. What her achieves in Calcutta cannot satisfy her inordinate ambition, and her anxieties increase. She is irritated till she gets love from Dharma. This diversion gives her bliss and joy. She comes out from her bad dreams. However, very soon her desires diminish her relationship with Dharma. Then she becomes violent. She realizes that her pride is hurt. Basically, she examines that her suffering has started after the death of her elder sister, Monisha. Gradually, she feels maturity in her behaviour.

Amla's real personality is to govern her own values and desires. She identifies herself as a more superior being, capable to achieve her path through life without being gloomy like Nirode and destructive like Monisha. She is aware of the "cold, frosty love of power" (109) inherent from her mother, and she quietly makes efforts to achieve glory, fame and self-satisfaction. Her eagerness and liveliness are different from her brother and sister who have lost their all faith. Amla has come to Calcutta with a target to become a professional artist. She is determined to enjoy the city, her new job and her independence, "Calcutta does not oppress me in the least...It excites me" (142), she tells Aunt Lila consciously. Primarily, after Nirode's and Monisha's complicated personalities, the third part of the novel expresses Amla's freshness and then soon frustration.

Basically, Amla's despairs are concerned to the effect of the monstrous city on a sensitive soul. Anita Desai declares in an interview with R. K. Shrivastava: "The powerful impression the city created on me." (Shrivastava 26) The joys and sorrows are represented in this novel and also the beauty and ugliness of Calcutta. The novelist affirms that she has tried to represent the duality of human activity, she is sure that there is much more about the modern awareness of the traditions. Amla feels the influence of Calcutta. In her distress, she feels that it is a horrible city where one cannot be one's self. Amla has to hide her paintings to guard them as a secret. She tells Nirode:

I have to keep things secret in this horrible city you told me so wonderful, such a challenge. If I were back in Kalimpong, I wouldn't have minded showing them to you, I should have liked to show them to you. But here, here ... here one must hide such things, cover up their weaknesses, protect their fragility, even destroy them if one doesn't want to see them get covered with filth and blood and rot. Nothing delicate can survive this (182).

Being a liberated and intelligent woman, Amla wishes as Aunt Lila puts it, "something greater than pleasure alone – or the security of marriage alone something more rare, more responsible" (145). Infact, Amla's search is directed towards this desire. She wishes to triumph all fears and struggles of life so as to give meaning to

her life. The self-confidence and will-power with which Amlalives in Calcutta denote her capability to enjoy a blissful life. Aunt Lila admires it, "That's the spirit in which to start your career, my girl. That's what I like to see in young spirit." (142) Amla's behaviour gives her an abundance of light-heartedness. Jit once remarks that she has a destructive quality in her. Her own unconquerability and her notions tell that there is nothing she cannot win. She is quite conscious of her youth and beauty. She knows herself that she can impress anyone and she does it successfully. It proves from the impressions she has created on Jit, Mr. Basu and even on the determined and alienated Dharma. In fact, it gratifies her pride to be the centre of attraction because it identifies her uniqueness. Karen Horney discusses this attitude and he points out that this can be termed as '*narcissism*' (Horney 123). Narcissism does not simply mean an egocentric love of oneself. According to Horney's theory, a narcissist wins early distinctions and sometimes, it is the favoured and admired child. Although he shows much optimism, buoyancy and self-confidence, he is basically a pessimist and suffers dejection. In Amla's attitude optimism and pessimism, joy and despair appear equally. When she moves optimistically towards life, apparently happy and carefree, there is a "giant exhaustion growing and swelling inside her, of a feeling of sick apprehension and despair overwhelms her" (167). Two opposite emotions toss her. On the one side, she is drawn by the pleasures of her life in Calcutta life, on the other, she is repelled and feels that pleasure is the worst sensation in this city; it has lost its glamour, freshness and utility. Symbolically, at the party all the people in that congested room appear to her as fishes. This resembles the reality of the human situation. At the same party, Jit remarks that Amla and her siblings involve themselves in tragedies of their own making and reach the dead end to find some solution:

I think you all involve yourselves in the tragedies of your own making. I think you all drive yourselves deliberately into that dead end where you imagine you will find some divine solution. But there is none, not in a life time, all of us discover that and we force ourselves to turn and take another road (178).

In order to come out from his loneliness and insecurity, a person abandons his individuality of the self and diminishes his worries. Amla feels aloof and despair and derives from her continuous but unconscious search to protect her instinctive life from impoverishment. Her quest is directed towards creativity.

In changing from commercial art to pure art, Amla shows her aesthetic inclination. Her profession is a union of commerce and art, and overthrows the very sense of creativity and beauty. In it the aesthetic and the materialistic are juxtaposed in a simultaneity which forbids communication at the deeper planes of consciousness. Amla leads to painting again and again, trying to change her conflicts into art. Her occupation is the routine, normal, pedestrian activity. It does not provide her the excitement and instincts of the glorious moments of creativity. Horrified by it she inclines towards the painting, trees, insects, birds, flowers: 'nonsense rhyme' in Bengali on them. She delights these moments of peace. This can be identified as a short phrase of 'peak experience', when she has lost all self-consciousness and has completely absorbed in non-self.

Anita Desai illustrates her condition lyrically:

She was frowning in an excess of care, hesitation and mother love over this grackle, patter-footed, whisper voiced little world that seemed to have shot down the central channel of a smooth, green plantain leaf, on a stream of rainwater, to land with a splash on her window-sill, when Nirode came in (181).

Amla's renewed vision is achieved through the instrumental relationship with Dharma. Even after her first meeting with Dharma, Amla reorients herself. Modeling for him makes her "translucent with joy and over flowing with a sense of love and reward" (210). Her real self, obscured so far by her ambitious self, tries to emerge. Anita Desai presents it symbolically as the warm crawling out of Amla's ring in dreams. Dharma paints the ring on her finger with the worm creeping "of her nightmare to push its insidious head out of the painted stone and arouse, in the painted Amla, that very turbulence of disgust, revulsion and fear that so often assailed the dreaming Amla" (213). This shows awe of real self. Dharma's love and art influence her. She correlates the self and the world and overcomes her anxiety. The novelist describes Amla's experiences as the excess of love, as a perfection in which "lay all the joy and the sense of being the right person in the right place that love should have made diffuse and scattered gently through the season" (217).

The relationship of Amla and Dharma is not well described in the novel. It is just exploration of reality and hallucination, creating a doubtful situation in which Dharma cannot give her anything actual or substantial. For the dreaming Amla, reality is enchanting but it checks her. She, the love-torn maiden, symbolized by the arching palms, is unable to meet her sparkling into water. This denotes, by implication, the impossibility of being and living her pompous individuality. It denotes that she has to find her real identity, however, horrified she may be of it. This happens at the unconscious level.

Amla's escaping from Dharma represents as ambiguous as her fondness for him. But she feels hurt to learn of Dharma's hard heartedness towards his only daughter and that she leaves him in disgust. Amla's attitude expresses that the causes for her decision to leave Dharma are not so common. Amla is specially anguished by her own complications – her pride and irritability. Pride, because she is so important in his life as to awaken his inactive talents. Irritability, because he is lost in his art and is diverted from her. These conflicts are uncontrolled and repudiate in the face of reality.

Amla searches the reasons of callousness of Dharma towards his daughter. When she turns out of his protective, he irritates with a feeling of helplessness and impotence. He tells Amla that he did not wish his daughter to grow, "I wanted her the same, always the same, beside me" (227). When she makes efforts out of his hold to marry a cousin, he becomes irritated, threatens her and in an attempt to save himself from the attack of self-hate disclaims his isolated areas, away from the city. This supplies his ego.

When Amla comes back again, she realizes him as an erring mortal and the identity she has of him as someone mysterious and forbidding is shattered. If he could neglect his daughter, he could ignore her also from his life. His perplexity towards his

profession is an affirmation that she has outlived her utility for him. Amla fears the truth because truth carries with it responsibilities and it is an anxiety producing state. The simplest course is to avoid the awareness of truth. The truth unfolds on her with liberty: that she is crushing horrifying grounds, that Dharma is committed to his wife and society, that he is a conformist, not possessing the power to enrich her life by providing her the joy of love. Aunt Lila's remark hurts her pride that Dharma was 'using' something in her.

Amla rejects Dharma. She tears up the invitation to Dharma's exhibition and goes with Jit for horse-race. This is her regression choice. It is a movement backward and her sick attitude of life symbolizes as a gamble. Then she realizes the bare reality-death. She also analyses the reality of life – life is a race, one has to participate in it and strive to win. A person who spoils and falls remains an 'outsider', occupied by the powers of self-hate, alienation, and self-destruction. In the shade of death she searches the value of life. She decides for progression. This is an eloquent move towards self-realization. Amla is confused between the pressures of her obsessive acts and her affirmative will-power. Her thinking to and fro indicates her doubts. As Nirode realizes in the novel, journey leads to an expanse of power of mind and body. Human capacity lies in making the journey worth and expansive. Amla clutches her actual self and provides the dignity she discloses.

The mother of Monisha, Amla and Nirode, repents for having come away to Kalimpong leaving her children in the monstrous city of Calcutta. The city of Calcutta has separated the mother from her children. She repents for not staying in Calcutta and expresses her grief at the rough life her children live in the metropolis, away from her:

Now I know I made the decisions and changes too abruptly without thinking clearly. Here's Monisha writing such detailed rot about her impossible family – as though she had actually immense herself in it, or as though it were a theatre to her, I cannot really tell. And Nirode, mute and in exile ... he must be living a sordid existence. I cannot bear thinking of it. And now Arun's gone from us to his blue eyed Nurse Agnes and they will never come to me as son and daughter. If they come, they will come as strangers (201-202).

Anita Desai is one of those novelists who have observed the vitality and changing roles of contemporary Indian women. Almost all of her women protagonists are conscious for their identity according to their own expectation and they prove that they are the dominant figures of their own areas. The frame and notions of Anita Desai aims at assessing her novels in the atmosphere of a shifting sensibilities and changing psychology. At present India is moving from a conservative and traditional social order to a liberal and open socio-cultural ethos. But it does not mean that her novels are only sociological documents or the reflections of Indian realities. Obviously, she is an artist responding to the basic questions of human existence and individuality. Anita Desai's attention is to the sufferings of the individual in relation to social forces that try to weaken human identity. She forces the study of the individual as an aggregate of the psychic and emotional instincts leads of characters.

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Greek Oedipus's Story and the Ethiopian Skendes's story

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Abstract

Here is the comparison of two famous stories which narrate the most unheard of stories where the hero lies down with his own mother, of course, with various reasons for it and supported by different contexts. In the Oedipus story the hero by all the purity of his heart did want to avoid such heinous crime in his life but is almost predestined by fate and unconsciously and unknowingly Oedipus is led by the forces of fate to this hateful crime. Not only does he marry his own mother Queen Jocasta, but he also brings forth four children from her, all four of whom in fact become simultaneously his siblings as well as his children. In the case of Skendes of Ethiopia, the situation is totally different. Caught up in the mesh of the wisecrack that all women are prostitutes, Skendes coming back after the higher studies abroad wanted to probe and verify this statement with regard to his own mother. He bribes the housemaid of his mother with hundred dinars and conveniently arranges to sleep with his mother for one night in order to test her loyalty to her dead husband. He succeeds and sleeps with his mother and then only reveals his identity to the mother hearing which she commits suicide. Pondering over this tragic end of his mother, Skendes takes an oath not to speak any more in his life. His philosophical visions communicated in writing to the then King of Ethiopia have become great source of inspiration for the Ethiopians. An analysis of these two stories is proposed in this paper.

Keywords: Oedipus Complex, Incest, Experimentation, Hasty belief, Presumption.

Introduction

When we make a survey of the World Literature at large, there are at least two special stories where the hero is somehow or other destined to or occasioned to sleep with his own mother. With regard to the hero of the first one, the Greek story of Oedipus,

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it is conspicuously worked out by the mysteriously inescapable fate of man. The fore knowledge of the hero about such a prophecy and the conscious attempts taken by the hero himself to shun such an embarrassing situation make the story of Oedipus more and more intensely pathetic. The second instance from Ethiopia could be attributed to a hasty belief in a philosophical maxim and the immature decision of a youngster to experiment with his own mother with regard to the veracity of that maxim. This hasty decision of generalizing the women's nature assumed by Skendes after his experimentation with his own mother, is not at all substantiated with reference to other women. And once the poor woman came to know that she had slept with her own son, she committed suicide. Skendes vowed not to speak any more, but became very famous after that and his Maxims are collected by the order of the King and Skendes became a respected wise man. A comparison between these two stories is proposed in this study.

Oedipus Trilogy

The first one is from the classical Greek Literature and composed by the great dramatist Sophocles in his trilogy of Oedipus story which is commonly known as the Theban Plays. Each of the plays in the Theban Plays relates to the tale of the legendary Oedipus, who happened to kill his father and marry his mother without knowing that they were his parents. His family is fated to be doomed for three generations.

In the first play *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus is the protagonist. Oedipus' infanticide is planned by his parents, King Laius and Queen Jocasta, to avert him from fulfilling a prophecy; in truth, the servant entrusted with the infanticide passes the infant on through a series of intermediaries to a childless couple, who adopt him not knowing his history. Oedipus eventually learns of the Delphic Oracle's prophecy of him, that he would kill his father and marry his mother; Oedipus attempts to flee his fate without harming those he knows as his parents (at this point, he does not know that he is adopted). Oedipus meets a man at a crossroads accompanied by servants; Oedipus and the man fight, and Oedipus kills the man (who was his father, Laius, although neither knew at the time). He becomes the ruler of Thebes after solving the riddle of the sphinx and in the process, marries the widowed queen, his mother Jocasta. Thus the stage is set for horror. When the truth comes out, following from another true but confusing prophecy from Delphi, Jocasta commits suicide, Oedipus blinds himself and leaves Thebes. At the end of the play, order is restored. This restoration is seen when Creon, brother of Jocasta, becomes king, and also when Oedipus, before going off to exile, asks Creon to take care of his children. Oedipus's children will always bear the weight of shame and humiliation because of their father's actions.

This gruesomely tragic story has been commonly approached with the explanatory note of man's incapability of squarely confronting with the forces of fate and destiny. One could find umpteen number of research studies trying to exonerate Oedipus with the responsibility of all the tragic things occurring in the play. We could also see attempts at highlighting the helplessness of the legendary Oedipus and trying to justify whatever he did in order to avert the sad occurring predestined for him by the fate. Some critical writers tried to see the play as a work of art and attributed the intensity

of tragedy to the scheme and plan of the playwright Sophocles. They tried to view the whole tragedy against the background of the tragic flaw (*hamartia*) of Oedipus. E.R. Dodd (2007) in his critical study explains: “His [Thyestes’] story has clearly much in common with that of Oedipus, and Plato as well as Aristotle couples the two names as examples of the gravest *Hamartia* . . . Thyestes and Oedipus are both of them men who violated the most sacred of Nature’s laws and thus incurred the most horrible of all pollutions; . . . The *hamartia* of Oedipus did not lie in losing his temper with Teiresias; it lay quite simply in parricide and incest – a *megaleh hamartia* indeed, the greatest a man can commit” (20).

In *Oedipus at Colonus*, the banished Oedipus and his daughter Antigone arrive at the town of Colonus where they encounter Theseus, King of Athens. He appeals to the world-famed hospitality of Athens and hints at the blessings that his coming will confer on the State as predicted by the Oracle. They agree to await the decision of King Theseus. From Theseus Oedipus craves protection in life and burial in Attic soil; the benefits that will accrue shall be told later. Theseus departs having promised to aid and befriend him. No sooner has he gone than Creon enters with an armed guard who seize Antigone and carry her off (Ismene, the other sister, they have already captured) and he is about to lay hands on Oedipus, when Theseus, who has heard the tumult, hurries up and, rescues them. He upbraided Creon for his lawless act, and threatened to detain him till he has shown where the captives have been and did everything for restoring them. In the last scene, Theseus returns bringing with him the rescued maidens. He informed Oedipus that a stranger who has taken sanctuary at the altar of Poseidon wished to see him. In fact, it was Polyneices who has come to crave his father’s forgiveness and blessing, knowing by an oracle that victory will fall to the side that Oedipus espouses. But Oedipus spurned the hypocrite, and invoked a dire curse on both his unnatural sons. As we read in the Argument of this play, “A sudden clap of thunder is heard, and as peal follows peal, Oedipus is aware that his hour is come and bids Antigone summon Theseus. Self-guided he leads the way to the spot where death should overtake him, attended by Theseus and his daughters. Halfway he bids his daughters farewell, and what followed none but Theseus knew. He was not (so the Messenger reports) for the gods took him” (*Sophocles’ Oedipus Trilogy*, p.74). Oedipus dies and strife begins between his sons Polyneices and Eteocles.

While feeling pity with the valiant and heroic Oedipus falling prey to the flaw of being upright and very investigative to inflict punishment on the culprit, there are scholars who pointed out the incestuous relationship of Oedipus with his daughters Antigone and Ismene. This is based on the reversal of *threptra* as is clear in the drama *Oedipus at Colonus*. Sarah Binns (2011) exclaims: “*Threptra* the Homeric word for the concept, is defined as ‘return for rearing’. . . . Through analysis of the use of *threptra* in Greek literature and in archaic Athenian history, we see its traditional role and obligations in society. Antigone and Ismene fulfill the *threptra* that should be their brothers’, an undermining of Greek practices as expressed in Hesiod and Herodotus. The roles of Ismene and Antigone are important, and Sophocles presents their relationship with Oedipus as incestuous. This incest, however, is yet another reversal from Oedipus Tyrannus that leads to positive results both for Oedipus and civic

society, as represented by Athens" (11). Dorothy Wilner (1982) "sees the relationship between Oedipus and his daughters as one metaphorical incest", and affirms that this seems to be a correct interpretation. She posits that "Oedipus seeks to bind his daughters to himself and displace his sons" (59).

In *Antigone*, the protagonist is Oedipus' daughter, Antigone. She is faced with the choice of allowing her brother Polyneices' body to remain unburied, outside the city walls, exposed to the ravages of wild animals, or to bury him and face death. The king of the land, Creon, has forbidden the burial of Polyneices for he was a traitor to the city. Antigone decides to bury his body and face the consequences of her actions. Creon sentences her to death. Eventually, Creon is convinced to free Antigone from her punishment, but his decision comes too late and Antigone commits suicide. Her suicide triggers the suicide of two others close to King Creon: his son, Haemon, who was to wed Antigone, and his wife, Eurydice, who commits suicide after losing her only surviving son.

The legendary story of Oedipus brings out a full length tragedy: Oedipus fated to marry his own mother and having brought forth four children from his own mother, all of it unwillingly and sans knowledge of the incest element, suffers excruciating pains when the reality was made known, afflicts severe self-punishment by making himself blind, Queen Jocasta prickly takes her life away, Antigone and Ismene's daughters and his two sons Polynices and Eteocles also suffer the tragic consequences and the members and relatives of that family are affected intently.

John Peradotto (1992) has "urged that Apollo not only predicts Oedipus' 'crimes,' and punishes him for them, but causes them to happen" (10). He means to affirm that the poet Sophocles causes them to happen. It can be understood on a level of poetic construction which is quite distinct from that on which he fabricates verisimilar motivation and action in his human characters. Obviously, the result of it will significantly reduce the usefulness of the play as a model for evaluating the relative merits of prophecy over sophistic science, to be taken as a model for a theory of action, or as a model for anything except perhaps the production of a powerfully persuasive ideological message.

Peradotto (1992) explains further: "What Apollo 'does' in the O[edipus] T[yrrannus] is something the poet is doing directly; what Oedipus "does" is something the poet does indirectly" (10). If we consider what "Oedipus" in this kind of story could or might be expected to do, we will try to pronounce a whole set of rules (verisimilitude) explicit, which are shaped by prevailing views about what human beings can or are likely to do in certain circumstances. The Audience- and reader-response is naturally controlled by such rules, and poets are obviously constrained by them; in composing, they must work through these rules at least in an indirect way. But if we ponder what "Apollo" in a story like this can or might be doing with respect to human beings, we realize that it is very nearly identical to what a poet, composing this kind of story, could do with respect to his characters. This explains why nothing that "Apollo" does in the play is motivated the way human actions in the play have to be motivated and are really motivated. What is to be noted well is that such direct operation of the poet on the plot, specifically in the creation of the coincidences, is construed, by the

unscientific mentality, as divine activity. In fact, the power of the play as a model of belief and conduct lies in the opacity of this distinction. To reveal the distinction is to demystify and so to neutralize that power. For our knowledge of how the effect is achieved can actually destroy the illusion, and, surely should do so.

Peradotto (1992) goes on to affirm: “Prophecy is not conceivable apart from narrative. It derives from narrative, from the representation of causal continuity in time. It is, I believe, less accurate to say that a narrative represents a prophecy than to say that prophecy represents that narrative, and does so by pre-presenting it, the frame paradoxically embedded in what it frames” (10).

Towards the end of his article Dodd (2007) concludes: “To me personally Oedipus is a kind of symbol of the human intelligence which cannot rest until it has solved all the riddles – even the last riddle, to which the answer is that human happiness is built on an illusion. I do not know how far Sophocles intended that. But certainly in the last lines of the play (which I firmly believe to be genuine) he does generalize the case, does appear to suggest that in some sense Oedipus is every man and every man is potentially Oedipus” (27).

There have been some versions of the Oedipus story where it is argued that Oedipus was not simply following his fate of committing the patricide by killing Laius, but it was a punishment for the crime of Laius falling in love with and carrying off his host’s youngest son, while enjoying the hospitality of Pelops. According to Thomas Gould (2007) “there is not a word of any of this in any surviving play by Sophocles. When, in the *Antigone*, Ismene and Antigone fear the working of a family curse, it is the consequences of the accidental marriage between Oedipus and Jocasta that they fear, not any old remembered crime of Laius’. In the *Oedipus at Colonus* (964ff) Oedipus says of his unwitting patricide and incest: this is the way the gods wanted it, perhaps because they had some ill will for my family from of old. Then he adds that he knows this because in him himself there was no flaw to upbraid in payment for which he had done these things against his parents and himself. And then he adds a second proof. If an oracle is given to a father that his son will kill him, he asks – if that oracle is given before the son is born – how could one blame the son? (40).”

The Story of Skendes

The second story in the purview of this study is that of Skendes who happened to experiment with his own mother to know the veracity of a wise philosopher’s maxim that “All women are prostitutes”, which is handed down to us by the Ethiopian Literature. A great scholar Claude Sumner has done extensive work on the Ethiopian philosophy and has produced a comprehensive volume *Classical Ethiopian Philosophy* (1985) and two special volumes of *Ethiopian Philosophy, Vol 1, The Book of the Wise Philosophers* (1974) and *Ethiopian Philosophy, Vol IV, The Life and Maxims of Skendes* (1981) all of which refer to this incestuous relationship of mother and son. The obvious similarity of this story to the Oedipus story cannot be ignored. But before we make a comparison between the two stories, I will try to retell this story as we draw it from extracts of all Sumner’s books referred to and as the story is compiled by Kiros Teodros (2004).

One of the outstanding texts of the fourteenth century [Ethiopian Literature] concerns the story of Skendes (Greek, Sekondos), a story that has fired the imaginations of Greek, Syrian, Arabic, and Ethiopian scholars over the centuries. The scholars are of general opinion that the Ethiopian text is based on the Arabic, although some scholars contend that its style is modeled on the Greek. The Ethiopian version is describing the story of Skendes, the son of sagacious parents, who decided to send him to Berytus (modern Beirut) and Athens for a classical education. The brilliant boy Skendes was thirteen years old at the time of his departure for higher studies in the foreign lands. During the span he stayed abroad, he had encountered with a statement of the wise philosophers that declared, "All women are prostitutes." He was greatly perturbed by the statement ever since he heard it and determined to verify it. After staying abroad for twenty-four years he returned to his homeland. Even now he was not liberated from the perturbing feelings he had when he had to confront with that disturbing statement about the women and was still unmarried. He recalled that disturbing statement about the nature of women, and decided to test his own mother. Through the services of a maid servant whom he met at a public well, he managed to trick the maid into letting him into his mother's house, to spend the night with her mistress in exchange for one hundred dinars. Gail M Presbey (2003) states, "While his mother had first vehemently refused the offer when her maid conveyed the message, she was later wooed by the maid's account of the handsomeness of her suitor. He spends the night with her, kissing her breasts, but going no farther"(142). As Skendes became successful in his experimentation with his mother, he concludes that the philosopher's maxim is true.

As Gail M Presbey asserted further: "However, this story goes on to convey both tragedy and Skendes's later success in life"(142). In the next morning after he spent the night with his mother, she questioned her maid asking with concern if he were not pleased with her. Skendes then explained: 'I am your son'. The poor mother could not bear with this shocking news and hence runs out and hangs herself. Skendes was surprised at what has happened and blamed his tongue and its utterance for the death of his mother and deeply regretted his words that had caused it. In atonement, he vowed never to speak again; from that moment on, he became permanently silent. As Sumner (1981) asserts: the "tragedy" of the story is that "his mother, as all women, is burdened with instincts that necessarily lead her to the incestual act; on the other hand, she is a free, responsible creature"(266).

Teodros Kiros (2004) explains the consequences, "the emperor at the time was Andryanos, and when he heard the extraordinary and tragic story of Skendes, he invited him to his court. When Skendes was ordered to speak, he refused; instead he wrote down his thoughts, and the king also communicated with him through writing" (166). His responses were all compiled and brought out into two books, with fifty-five questions in the first and 108 questions in the second. After the emperor had carefully perused all his responses, and he was deeply impressed with the depth of those responses given in writing by Skendes, and so did not order the philosopher to speak. Instead of it, it was officially decided that the work of Skendes will be treated as a national treasure and should be preserved in the priests' archives.

The philosopher Skendes developed in his discourses systematic theories about the essence of God, the angels, the universe, and the elements, and about the soul, human nature, and the spirit. Many of his other discourses speculate about the emotions and states of being. According to Sumner, the obstinate silence of Skendes produced an implacable dialectic of speech and silence in classical Ethiopian philosophy. The importance of silence and wisdom, the need to control the tongue, thus became powerful ethical and sapiential themes in classical Ethiopian philosophy.

The *Book of the Philosophers*, *Fisalgos*, and Skendes's sayings are both literary and philosophical. At issue is not the status of the texts. They are broadly speaking philosophical in their own right. It is the case, however, that they are derivative transformations of non-Ethiopian texts to which Skendes and many others contributed. Some of the sayings are natively Ethiopian, based on observation, reports, readings of the Bible, and other sources. Given Ethiopia's location and history, it is not an accident that the sapiential themes are at once Arabic, Syrian, biblical, and Greek. Ethiopia is clearly at the confluence of world cultures, and its philosophical tradition precisely reflects that confluence.

Gail M. Presbey affirms (2003): "The broad wisdom tradition of Ethiopia emphasizes vices of women so that women will be seen as needing to subject themselves to men's rule" (151).

It should be specially noted that immediately after the death of his mother, it is this act alone for which Skendes felt any guilt at all, and not the complete scenario that preceded it, for he can observe an immediate connection between the two events. When Skendes finally communicated to the King the circumstances of his mother's death, he protected himself from any small part of blame in her death, through a reasoned argument contemplating necessity. He tried to explain that the death was the outcome of a chain of coincidental events, thus severing any form of causality, and therefore blame, between his own words and actions to his mother and her resultant suicide. He tried to bring an analogy to a parable of the "milk-bearer" which again was wholly inappropriate as a parallel to his own actions. As a matter of fact, the honest and guileless milk-bearer of his story, in feeding guests milk which she does not know is accidentally poisoned, is engaging in an act of gracious hospitality that would be praised in most circumstances. As highlighted by Sumner (1985) clearly: "Skendes is instead engaging in deception, incest, and payment for sexual favors – all morally unacceptable behaviors. The resulting suicide of his mother, while not foreseen by him, is triggered by his unacceptable actions as well as her shame at having cooperated with him in forbidden deeds" (178-80). Surprisingly, the outcome of his experiment and his mother's expression of her shame does not lead Skendes to question the universality of the maxim which he confidently verified, and which he continues to believe after her death.

Conclusion

We have gone through the pathetically miserable stories of two women victims. When we compare the fate of these two women, the first one Queen Jocasta cannot be held responsible at all for the incestuous relationship with his son Oedipus.

Similarly, the mother of Skendes has fallen prey to the feminine weakness of yielding to a covetable and most suitable suitor for love. Both of them never had any inkling to sleep with their own sons. Analyzing the stories at this perspective we come to learn that both these women should be exonerated of the incestuous crime of sleeping with their sons. It is only the fate and circumstances alone which forced them to be the victims of such a predicament. Both of them had to take away their precious lives once they understood the truth of the unthinkable heinous crime of sleeping with their own children.

A comparison and contrast with the two men characters would be more interesting in the scope of this study. With regard to Oedipus the first hero, he is the one who was always bent on eschewing any crimes in his life. The twisty turns of events one after the other led the valiant and heroic Oedipus to the utmost shameful moment in his life. The more and more he was intent on avoiding the predicted crimes and running away from them, the deeper and deeper Oedipus was immersing into the abyss of fateful ignominy. It is true that Oedipus has achieved a legendary status in the world of literature and Sigmund Freud the psychologist elevated him to greater levels by conceptualizing the Oedipus complex. As asserted by Joshua Waggaoner (2017): "To reiterate, we know that Freud recognized Oedipus the King to be 'comparable to the work of psychoanalysis' primarily because of the delayed discovery of the king's true identity (Freud 1940, p. 160) The correlation is made possible in part by the play's tragic irony, which transforms the audience and certain characters (i.e., Tiresias and the shepherd) into the analyst who watches the analysand (Oedipus) come to terms with his past (8 of 11)".

With regard to Skendes the second hero, the most important difference between him and Oedipus is that Skendes fully knew what he was going to do when he ventured to experiment with his own mother. So naturally the story of Skendes spending one night with his own mother is not so intensely pathetic as in the case of Oedipus sleeping with his mother and bringing forth four children quite unaware of it for a pretty long span of time. As Sumner (1981) has observed in *The Life and Maxims of Skendes*: "The emphasis on Freudian psychology turns Skendes into an individual with a complex neurosis: he is immature, infantile in so far as he has not passed through a stage that most boys grow out of (227-28, 234)". After Skendes has sent the maid with the message of the offer to his mother, he states that he will rejoice in his mother's virtue if she turns down the offer; and if she says yes, then he will be satisfied that the philosophers are indeed a sound source of wisdom. The Freudian analysis has to say that his true happiness would be if he were to be able to sleep with his mother – the one thing that Skendes denies is a motive of his at all. Such an analysis turns Skendes into a liar and self-deceiver, when the text presents him as an earnest young man in pursuit of knowledge.

In fine, as Gail M. Presbey (2003) has highlighted the difference between Oedipus story and the story of Skendes excellently in concise terms: "The Skendes story differs from the Greek Oedipus tragedy. In the Greek Version, Oedipus is pitied because his life is ruined by what he has done; both Oedipus and his mother are destroyed. But Skendes is catapulted to fame and success by his experiment with his mother; his

mother suffers a tragedy, while he escapes unscathed. He suffered from the memory of the death of his mother. However he curiously protected himself from realizing an accurate account of his role in her death, by blaming only one body part, his tongue, for having uttered the words 'I am your son' (145)."

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Ecofeminism in Indian Fiction: A Select Study

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Abstract

Ecofeminism is a philosophical and political theory which combines ecological concerns with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from male hegemony of society. It is evident that the values of patriarchal and paternalistic/capitalistic society bring about deleterious effects as man in his studied ignorance is hell-bent on exploiting nature's resources in order to advance his misdirected rank interests. Consequently it has led up to an undesirable split between the environs and culture. Eco or ecological feminism explores the inter-connections between women and nature striving to bring about equality between genders, a revaluing of non-patriarchal or nonlinear structures, and a view of the world that respects organic processes, holistic connections, and the merits of intuition and collaboration. There are scores of writers belonging to Indian literature who seek to focus on the outcome of gender categories in order to demonstrate the ways in which social norms exert unjust dominance over women and nature.

The focus of the paper is to bring out ecofeministic concerns in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), among a few other novels. While doing so, the papers critiques the need to make a concerted effort to bring all initiatives under one umbrella to safeguard the blue planet lest her very existence is at peril.

Keywords: Nature, Woman, Exploitation, Ecofeminism, Lusibari, Ecosystem.

The values of patriarchal and paternalistic/capitalistic society bring about pernicious changes in Nature as man in his informed ignorance is hell-bent on exploiting her resources. While he enjoys the looted bounty, woman and Nature suffer. His brushes aside the ultimate values of life to be at peace with him and the world about him.

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Consequently the flawed perspective has led up to an undesirable split between the environs and culture.

Ecofeminism primarily “analyzes the interconnection of the oppression of women and nature” (Bressler 236). It seeks to dwell into the inter-connections between women and nature striving to bring about equality between genders, a revaluing of non-patriarchal or nonlinear structures, and a view of the world that respects organic processes, holistic connections, and the merits of intuition and collaboration. There are scores of women writers belonging to Indian literature who seek to focus on the outcome of gender categories in order to demonstrate the ways in which social norms exert unjust dominance over women and Nature. They bring out an alternative construct that values the earth as a congenial place bringing the point home that humanity’s dependency on the natural world, and embraces all life as valuable. Indefatigably, Eco feminists have striven to keep the centrality of insights to environmental philosophy and feminism on the pedestal. They descant upon the insidious nature of man in appropriating Nature’s laws thereby shedding light on the commodification of Nature and of women. The paper seeks to explore some pertinent issues under question. It is divided into three parts. The first part shows how Nature and woman have been victimized by men. In the second part, the corollary of argument is presented and the last part shows some observations drawn from the study.

I

The writers across all literary genres suggest that sensitivity to our environs should be cultivated and humanity should learn to live in harmonious co-existence. Many of them also dwell on the redeeming role of women in offering alternative discourses. The focus of the paper is to bring out ecofeministic concerns in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* (2004). cursory references are also made to Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* (1997), Arvind Adiga’s *The White Tiger* (2008) among a few other novels.

Though my main thrust of the paper is to map out the eco-feminist thought in a few novels, it does not subscribe to the ever-overarching notions showing Nature and women as victims and man as a ravisher. It stands to reason that woman and Nature are exploited by menfolk. However, men are generally considered Messiahs of Nature but they are the ones who are out to molest and ransack Nature. There is a pressing need to show women’s “epistemic privilege” and the need for “feminist” standpoint epistemologies. It also looks at the practices that currently feminize nature and naturalize women and the practices of anthropocentric and andocentric bias.

Amitav Ghosh’s novel is, widely considered a work of bioregionalism dealing with the vengeful beauty of the Sunderbans. A scholar by name Piyali Roy, a cetologist who is visiting the Sundarbans to conduct a survey of the marine mammals. She is keen on studying the pattern of behaviour of Dolphins. She discovers some strange behavioural quirks amongst Irawaddy Dolphins in a tide pool while visiting the islands on a grant. A young, illiterate fisherman, Fokir, comes to her rescue when she is thrown from a boat into crocodile-infested waters.

While visiting the Sunderbans on a study grant, Piyali comes upon two individuals who are diametrically opposite in temperament. One is Kanai, a complacent refined hailing from Delhi and an illiterate and haughty local man belonging to Lusibari. As the three of them launch into the elaborate backwaters, they are drawn unawares into the hidden undercurrents of this isolated world, where political turmoil exacts a personal toll that is every bit as powerful as the ravaging tide. The humans share a complex and dangerous ecosystem with animals. Piyali is drawn towards the raw charm of Fokir and finds herself attracted towards the natural and pure world that Fokir represents. The clash of interest can be seen in Fokir's fear of outsiders like Kania who are civilized. It is an exploration of the plight of the homeless refugees for a green island home, because Bangladesh, their original homeland, happened to be so green and so full of rivers. The hunger is never lost sight of both metaphorically and physically. The author has upheld the cause of the settlers at Marichjhan.

II

Ghosh's ecofeminist activism calls into question the injustice meted out to the nonhuman world and woman. Set mostly in the Sunderbans, an archipelago, Ghosh talks about the vast bioregion and scrutinizes its flora and fauna and the people living precariously in the region. The novel has two plots; the first, it explores the plight of the displaced – a group of refugees from Bangladesh who found themselves in direct confrontation with the Indian government in 1979. Another issue being raised is how human beings share a complex and dangerous ecosystem with animals. The novelist's ecological sensitivity and awareness is keen as he mingles history, myth and fiction to delve into the treacherous terrains of Sundarbans where human destinies are shaped and structured by the ebb and flow of water. The novel juxtaposes two temporal narratives – that of the Morichjhapi massacre and Piyali, a young marine biologist's research on the Irrawaddy dolphins – to highlight the central conflict between animal conservation and human rights. The two principal settings, Lusibari and Garjontola are fictitious while the other locations, Canning, Morichjhapi etc., are real.

The flora of Sunderbans is unique. It is one of the largest forests lying on the delta of the Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna rivers on the Bay of Bengal. The terrain with rich ecological significance is intersected by a complex network of tidal waterways and tiny islands of salt-tolerant mangrove forests and presents an excellent example of ongoing ecological processes. The area is known for wide range of fauna, including the quirky dolphin, Bengal tiger and other threatened species like estuarine crocodile. Ghosh foregrounds the terrain creates "defamiliarization" through linguistic (i.e., pertaining to language) "dislocation" that calls readers' attention to the strangeness of the world or the perception of the world portrayed or depicted in the literary work. Ghosh transcends the normal communicative resources of the language, and awakens the reader, by freeing him from the grooves of cliché and banal expressions, to a new perceptivity. The landscape that the novelist presents is like "compilation of pages that overlap without any two ever being the same" (224).

Most of the action takes place in Lusibari which looks like “a huge earthen arc, floating serenely above its surroundings at low tide while at high tide the same island looks like flimsy saucer that could tip over at any moment and go circling down the depths” (116). Hundreds and thousands acres of tidal forested area disappear underwater and re-emerge hours later. “Some days the water tears away entirepeninsulasat other times it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before” (7). As Buell posits that the impermanence of tidal terrain assumes great importance in eco-critical analysis. Ghosh shows that place is relative and uncertain in the novel. In the same way, time runs at a deer’s pace. Huge carcasses, the remains of gigantic ships which were capsized get assimilated by the hungry tides. “Nothing escapes from the maw of the tides (225). Nature cannot be a benign mother that can be found in eco-criticism is mostly absent here in the work. In a way, the destructive forces of Nature like the storm, the rains and the tide on the one hand and crocodile and tiger on the other are described in detail. The individuals who are well-prepared to survive are best adapted to their environment. This bio-spherical egalitarianism can be seen in the novel. Man slaying the tiger and tiger killing man happen continually. Nelima says “in the twenty first century, it is difficult for you to imagine yourself being attacked by a tigerit’s not in the least bit out of the ordinary. It happens several times a week” (240).

The Sunderbans seems to be a mysterious place; in legends and fairy tales, they are usually inhabited by ferocious creatures. It is a place of troubles and turbulence, a realm of death holding the secrets of nature which man must penetrate to find meaning. In analytical psychology, the forest represents femininity. However, it is the young woman, Piyali who seeks to unravel and explore some of its mysteries unknown. It stands for the unconscious and its mysteries. The forest has great connection with the symbolism of the mother; it is a place where life thrives. However, it must also be noted that it can be seen as a contrast with the city and comfort of the home, the forest harbors all kinds of dangers and demons, animals, enemies and diseases.

Ghosh divulges how Piya and the dolphin are susceptible to male domination and exploitation. Many a time Piyali feels that she is as vulnerable as the animals. The young local representative of the Fisheries Department, Mr. Rath, tried to intimate with Piya, who in all her innocence, divulges her misfortunes befell her childhood. With little sensitivity, he made them known to all. She felt that “... the most intimate details of her life were common knowledge among the men of the town” (314) and therefore, she had to move away in “. . . sheer humiliation of having had her life laid bare before the whole town” (314). On going back to her place, Piyali was flummoxed as the fate of women doing research in the field of biology was no different: “It was as if what I’d been through wasn’t even my own story - just a script we were all doomed to live out” (314). Opening of aquariums in Eastern Asia where the Irrawaddy dolphins were treated “valuable commodity” (306), speaks volumes for the commodification of nature and spreading of the rabid man-made consumerist culture. Arundhati Roy also contests the insidious ways such hierarchies percolate through patriarchal ideology and an apparently rational economic logic.

Piya partakes of Mother Nature quality in herself. When people want to prey upon the tiger for killing the herds and people, she raises an objection: "This is an animal... You can't take revenge on an animal" (294). Kanai, however, justifies the villagers' action. She has her own valid reasons for vehemently opposing such stance: "Once we decide we can kill off other species, it'll be the people next. . . people who're poor and unnoticed" (301). Later she was informed that that the tiger had gone past her boat. Her remark has a ring of sarcasm: ". . . since we were all asleep, it was in no danger of being spotted" (291).

The novelist also shows that the instinctive fear is beneficial to humans in many ways. He also shows that the association between fear of a number of animals and perceptions of the animals as uncontrollable, unpredictable, dangerous and disgusting is not good. Fokir wants Kani to fear the fear: "...it's the fear that protects you, saar; it's what keeps you alive. Without it the danger doubles" (244). The government is also protective. But in the name of tiger preservation human lives are threatened: the tigers routinely maul and often kill islanders.

The Lusibari island is often punctuated by the fierce growls of tigers. Kanai has got rid of a tiger which is on its prowl and is ready to pounce upon him. However, Heren feels that if the tiger had been there, Kanai would have been killed as the Bengal does not let people go scot-free. Thus the whole narrative is replete with many animal assaults. "Every year dozens of people perish in the embrace of that dense foliage, killed by a tiger, snake or crocodile..." (79). Piya escapes a crocodile's attack by hair breadth. "Nobody finds the remains of people who're killed by crocodiles" (328). Kusum's father was also killed by a tiger. It is for this reason that those who kill tiger will be rewarded. For instance, Horen's uncle Bolai who had killed a tiger was rewarded with two bighas of land in Lusibari. Piya's research shows that the marine mammals, Dolphins and other animals are on the decline owing to motor boats and nylon nets. Without the imposing presence of tigers, the Sunderbans would disappear. However, with their habitat loss and dwindling prey, they sneak into the villages and human habitations. Man in his greed would like to poach the tigers for their claws and skin, the felling of Mangrove trees, killing of dolphins for their magic oil, the steady destruction of flora and fauna makes one wonder whether the Sunderbans could escape man's onslaughts.

However, the novelist underscores the importance of man getting along with all other animals. The deity of the forest, Bon Bibi reigns supreme and all wild creature in particular act at her bidding. Many people who repose faith in her believes in her omnipotence. "No man who is good at heart has anything to fear in this place" (324).

When nature's fury gets unleashed, the image of Mother Nature and her bounty does not come to one's mind. The malevolence of Nature is given threadbare. When the cyclones have struck the land with tragic regularity, describing the cyclone, he says: "the usual blowing and sighing and rustling had turned into a deep, ear-splitting rumble as if the earth itself had begun to move" (379). The wall of water that hits Piya and Fokir makes them feel as if a dam had broken over their face with death and makes her beg that her death should happen not on water but on land. The archipalego

Sunderbans is a metaphor for that ephemerality. Whole islands are washed away by the cyclones that sweep in with huge tidal surges. Thousands of human beings and animals routinely die in these storms. The cyclone is a great leveler reducing the bird and the beast and man. It kills Fokir, a man of Sunderbans sacrificing himself for Piyali who decides to engage with the fisherman for her idealistic project in the tide country – her new home. The river in *The God of Small Things* (1997) and many other novels gets polluted and the space was encroached.

III

The forest cover has become less dense with the trees getting dwarfed and bushy. Loss of mangroves and consequent habitat fragmentation is a major concern throughout the world's tropical countries. Conversion of mangrove habitat due to aquaculture, agriculture, urbanization and industrialization, ecotourism, overlapping bureaucracy and conflicting policies is occurring at a striking rate. Loss of mangroves is now a prominent global issue, associated with the loss of biodiversity, deterioration of habitat integrity, climatic changes, the amount of carbon sequestration, and resulting sea-level rise. "Formerly man had been part of nature; now he is the exploiter of nature" (White 8).

To conclude, the paper critiques the need to make concerted effort to bring all initiatives to safeguard the blue planet and woman lest their very existence should be at peril. In positing a polarized and rigid notion of 'feminine' and 'masculine' values, claiming that women are more empathic than men seems suspect as seen in *Hungry Tide*. A closer textual examination illustrates a more ambiguous reality. Piyali empathizes with the forested terrain and even illiterate and boorish men as she has reciprocated much of her ardour. Kanai is a different case. He is urbane and therefore, has some entrenched prejudices against nature. And this cannot be pressed into service saying that men are indifferent and callous to nature. Shiva's argument, that in some cultural and historical moments (some) women are 'closer to nature' than (some) men, may be justified. But structuring a mutual inferiorisation of 'women' and 'nature' may not be possible here in the novel. Therefore, the assertion of eco-feminists that the oppression of the natural world and of women by patriarchal power structures go together cannot be brought out in the novel. Fokir who always looks docile resembles a caged bird in the presence of his ambitious wife Moyna. Therefore, he shows his predilection to confine himself to his boat. In Anita Desai's *Raka*'s announcement that she has set the forest on fire provides another example of man's insensitivity to nature. The "fire" metaphorically smolders within her before it literally ignites a beautiful place. While there are few important "events" in the rest of the novel, Anita Desai prepares the reader for the horrific ending by carefully embedding violence in her imagery and in her symbolism. In effect, the "fire" metaphorically smolders within her characters before it literally ignites the mountains.

In the novel, *The Hungry Tide* all the female characters do not orchestrate plans to their personal life. Piya clamours for the endangered species, dolphins and tigers; Kusum pawns down her life for the settlers; Nilima forgoes her cozy city life for the

sake of enhancing the quality of the locals living in the archipelago; even the illiterate fisherman's wife, Moyna is tense about the consequences of man's inroads into nature. According to Ghosh, man must have some spiritual affinity with the world and its inhabitants. Ecofeminism urges humans to have a more balanced sustainable development. Ghosh's advocacy of "ecological democracy" and ecohumanitarianism can only absolve the planet of the present impending doom of extinction.

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Book Reviews

Ada Aharoni and Vijay Kumar Roy, eds. *IFLAC Anti-War and Peace Anthology*. USA: Amazon Kindle, 2018 (PB & e-book). pp. 311. Price US\$ 4.11. ISBN: 978-1980971948; ASIN: B07CRJSFQ6.

Reviewed by
Toni Matthias Mey*

The *IFLAC Anti-War and Peace Anthology* is an exceptional collection of articles and creative works, with the aim to unite writers, poets and artists to use the power of literature and culture for peacemaking. This anthology is based on articles, short stories and poems from writers of 25 different countries around the world, embracing the fact that culture can be a global tool to eliminate the hate towards 'the others' and to make us see the shared human common ground.

This project was organized and edited by Prof. Ada Aharoni from Israel and Dr. Vijay Kumar Roy from India as part of IFLAC, the International Forum for Literature and Culture of Peace. IFLAC is a global network of people armed with pens and determined to overcome violence and war.

The roots of IFLAC go back to a small group of courageous Arab and Jewish women in Haifa, Israel, who were determined to use the power of words to fight the concept of war. In 1974, one year after the Yom Kippur War, they founded "The Bridge", which was the first organization in Israel that dared to gather Jewish and Arab women for peace in the Middle East. As husbands, sons and male friends, as well as peacemakers from abroad, asked to join the women of 'The Bridge', the organization was renamed IFLAC. Today IFLAC includes a network with branches in many countries all over the world, uniting people determined to end war, before war ends humanity.

The head of IFLAC is Professor Ada Aharoni, who was born in Cairo and lives today in Haifa. She is a writer, poet and professor of Sociology, in the field of "Conflict Resolution and Peace Research". So far, she has published 34 books that have won her international acclaim and many prizes. Her books have been translated into many languages.

In her Introduction, Ada Aharoni powerfully illustrates the success and effect the *Anti-Terror and Peace: IFLAC Anthology* (2016) had. In one of her examples, she quotes a student of the University of Cairo who thanked her saying: "I was a man of

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war and terror, and I convinced many of my friends to come with me to Syria to help the Daesh terrorists to build the Islamic State. However, after reading your enlightening and convincing *Anti-Terror and Peace: IFLAC Anthology* (2016) and your tragic true stories and moving peace poems – I gradually became a man of peace.” (p. 12). After he and his friends read Aharoni’s Introduction to the *Anthology*, they understood that the propaganda of the so called “ISIS - The Islamic State,” was wrong and that a World Islamic Caliphate was impossible, as none of the Muslim countries supported it. The book played an important role in saving the lives of those youths and saved the world from a gang of additional possible terrorists. What a successful story which illustrates perfectly the power of words and the difference peace literature and education can make.

In his Preface, Dr. Vijay Kumar Roy convincingly argues that the belief system makes the difference between war and peace. Many people follow a religion to have a moral anchor, but religion does not necessarily lead to peace: “There are many terrorist organizations whose followers offer prayers and kill innocent people using the name of God! They preach to people according to their own belief system that is venomous” (19). Likewise, Vijay Kumar Roy says that, the business orientated globalization does not lead to peace as long as it does not succeed in creating positive social values, which are fundamental for peace. Vijay Kumar Roy shows that belief systems start wars but can also be the foundation of peace. This *IFLAC Anthology* displays the hideous face of the logic of violence and shows how bridges of peace can be built.

Prof. Ada Aharoni addresses in her interesting article “ Hamas must Change its Charter of Destruction,” a core obstacle for peace in the Palestine-Israel Conflict. She argues that for a prosperous Palestine, Hamas has to abolish its hateful Charter and create a peaceful new one, which recognizes the existence of the Israeli state. Since until now it says already in the preamble of the Hamas Charter: “Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it, just as it obliterated others before it”.

Where does this hate come from? Ada Aharoni answers: “There are many misconceptions that have created deep wounds in the hearts of the Palestinians” (51). Aharoni explains that Israel was established, because the Israeli side accepted the UN Partition Plan of 1947. However, many Palestinians until today think that Israel is an illegal state although the majority of the UN voted for its creation.

Another major misconception Aharoni points out, is that many Palestinians “feel they are the only ones who are the victims of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, and the only ones who have been uprooted. This of course is completely wrong, as in every war both sides suffer” (51). While it is well known, that as a result of the 1948 war around 700,000 Palestinians left the country, it is widely ignored, that almost a million Jews were banished or fled from Arab Countries after the establishment of the Israeli State, in 1948. Today, there are almost no Jews left in most of the Arab Countries.

Ada Aharoni knows what she is talking about, because in addition to her having researched this subject in depth as a sociologist, she herself was born and grew up in the Jewish Community in Cairo. In 1949 she and her family were forced to leave Egypt, in what she calls in her books: The Second Exodus of the Jews from Egypt,

and everything they had was confiscated by the Egyptian government. She impressively states: “In Egypt for instance, there were 100,000 Jews living there in 1948, and today there are only 6 very old Jewish widows left in the whole of Egypt!”

In February 2019, a year after the publishing the *IFLAC Anthology*, Egypt’s President El Assisi said that if there would be a resurgence of the vibrant Jewish community in Egypt, the Egyptian government would build synagogues and other related services (Jerusalem Post, 25.02.2019).

In the meantime, Egypt is renovating the existing synagogues which are attracting many tourists from abroad.

This supports Ada Aharoni’s message in the *Anthology*, that hopefully: “ Hamas will realize the Palestinians have so much more to gain by making peace with Israel, like Egypt and Jordan, and they will annihilate their Charter, instead of trying for the fifth time to destroy Israel” (52).

Yossin Beilin has contributed a well-argued article called “Israel Faces a New Decision as New Population Figures Emerge” to the *IFLAC Anthology*, which is dedicated to the Two-State Solution, as an answer to the question of a possible Palestinian majority in Israel. Beilin has served in various positions in the Knesset and the Israeli government, including Minister for Justice and Religious Affairs. He was involved in several Agreements like the initiating of the Oslo process, the Beilin-Abu Mazen agreement, the Geneva Peace Initiative and the project Birthright that makes it possible for Jewish youths to visit Israel.

According to Beilin, the puzzle is, how to deal with the fact that: “the number of Jews and Arabs living under Israeli control in the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean [have] reached parity at 6.5 million for each side” (43). The question Beilin brings up goes down to the root of the Zionist project. “Over the years, the Zionist left kept warning about the prospect of a Jewish minority in Israel controlling a Palestinian majority, with only a small number of them enjoying full civil rights” (43). Beilin gives a strong argument in favor of a Two-State solution. He argues that, denying a Palestinian State means to question the democratic character of the State of Israel. In other words, if the leading right in Israel stresses the Jewish character of Israel, without recognizing the necessity of a Palestinian State, it undermines the democratic system. Today usually Palestinians choose to have the Israeli citizenship in order to have the privileges that come with it: Health insurance, pension insurance, higher salaries etc. Therefore, Israel has an interest in a stable, prosperous Palestinian state, that could preserve the majority of Jews in Israel, as well as its democracy.

Beilin convincingly argues in favor of a Two-State Solution, showing that it is not only a violent conflict with suffering on both sides, but it would be a win-win situation for the two parties. This article stands for IFLAC’s approach to find smart political solutions, rather than stiff inefficient military action, that can’t achieve a solid and full peace.

The *IFLAC Anthology* also includes an interesting article by Prof. Johan Galtung, the well-known founder of Peace Studies, and the first Peace and Conflict Studies

Institute in Oslo, Norway. His approach of the three dimensions of violence: the physical, structural and cultural dimension, is widely adopted amongst academics and beyond: The physical violence is for instance the violence of War and Terror, the structural violence is for example the violence of exploitation by capitalism and the hierarchic structures of authority and the cultural violence is the legitimization of violence through ideology. The last dimension is very important for IFLAC, since it highlights the importance of creating a peace culture ideology to counteract the culture of violence ideology, and with the aim of building a world system without structural or physical violence.

In his article, Galtung presents the Transcend Method, which “uses dialogues with all parties to identify their goals, testing their legitimacy and visions of a new social reality meeting legitimate goals” (53). Johan Galtung's approach should be considered more often in Conflict Resolution and by Governments all over the world. It is never just the political leaders that can build peace, the civic societies on both sides are responsible to claim peace. This is the goal of IFLAC and this *Anthology* is a part of its peace education for a peaceful global society.

The second part of the *Anthology* is enriched by short stories. Ruth Fogelman wrote two of these enthralling short stories, which depict intercultural encounters. She is a poet and writer, who since 1979 lived in the Old City of Jerusalem. In the first one called “On the Seam”, she describes in a beautiful way the life of a neighborhood, supposedly in Jerusalem, describing how she meets three people in a corner groceries store. She talks to them in three different languages: Arabic, English and Hebrew.

As I live in Haifa, where Hebrew, Arabic, English and Russian are widely present on the streets, I fully relate to this story. I am convinced that it is important to tell stories about intercultural communities living in peace and harmony together.

In the second one “What if ...?” Ruth Fogelman describes the encounter between a crying Jewish boy on the street and an Arab adolescent who comes by with his wooden cart. Ahmed tries to help the boy and sits with him for a while, when he leaves he asks himself: “What if I had been born to his parents, and he to mine ...” (65).

This reminds me of the peace poet Wilfred Owen, who wrote during World War I: “Why should I kill this young German? If I had met him in a Bar I would have invited him to a Beer!”. These kinds of questions, automatically question war and violence. How can we hurt someone that could have been us? We should not! Due to this fact, it is important to reflect: “What if I was on the other side?”, a question which helps to overcome the dehumanization of violence and helps to build mutual understanding and recognition.

The third part of the *Anthology* is a collection of various peace poems and paintings. Ada Aharoni proves with her poems that she is not only a great researcher in the field of Conflict Resolution, but also a smart and powerful poet and artist. Her Poem “A Bridge of Peace” begins with two strong quotes one from the *Bible* and one from the *Koran*: “They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid.” (*The Bible*, Micha, 4.4) and “He who walks with peace, walks with him” (*The Koran*, Sura 48). With these quotes Ada Aharoni shows

that both religions encourage people to live peacefully together. In her own words Ada Aharoni addresses her Arab counterpart: “My Arab sister, let us build a wonder bridge from your fig tree and vine to mine” (67). As until today war is led by men, Aharoni addresses the women to end war and to support the culture of peace. She stresses that nobody wants to do harm to the other: “I do not want to be your oppressor, you do not want to be my oppressor, or your jailer, or my jailer” (67). And Aharoni concludes “So, my Arab sister, let us build a sturdy bridge of tolerant jasmine understanding” (68). This beautiful poem is a master piece full of symbolic language, referring to the common roots of the Jewish and the Muslim religions, including the Middle Eastern nature and addressing the gender aspect of peace. This truly shows how to use words to lead people in conflict to a prosperous peaceful future.

Another particular thoughtful poem is written by Varda Breger, who lives in Tel Aviv, Israel. It deals with ecological and social issues, including peace promotion in her paintings and poems. In her poem: “Wandering Birds,” she looks at the wandering birds and contrasts their peaceful freedom to the civilization of the world today:

From north to south and back,
 season after season
 millions of miles
 no fuel
 no flag
 no religion and
 no borders.
 Caressing the planet
 feathers of fraternity (Varda Breger 147).

Varda Breger illustrates in a talented way, how we humans have created fuels, flags, religion, and borders, but they do not help us to create a peaceful society. The way I read the poem, I am convinced that since we created all these categories we can change them for the good of the planet and the good of the people. This is certainly a powerful message that needs to be shared.

The *Anthology* does not only include powerful words but also beautiful paintings that spread the message of peace. Like the “Doves for Peace” painted by Gian Piero Act is from Italy (122), in which one can see three white doves, one of them with an olive twig in its beak, flying towards a bright light, flying towards peace. Ada Aharoni shows that she masters this genre as well, with a beautiful painting called “Dancing the Tango of Life” (129), depicting vibrant feelings with bright gay colours.

To conclude, the *IFLAC-Anti-War and Peace Anthology* is a marvelous collection of articles, true stories, poems and art pieces united by the will to overcome violence and war and to build a peaceful global village. I hope that this message will be taught across the globe in kindergartens, schools, colleges and universities to strengthen the culture of peace. The *IFLAC Anthology* shows that it is possible to build bridges of peace and that Peace Culture and Literature are powerful weapons to overcome violence and create peace.



Ada Aharoni. *From the Nile to the Jordan*. 2nd Enlarged Edition. Haifa, 2017 (PB & e-book). pp. 335. Price US\$14.25. ISBN-13: 978-1535165983.

***Reviewed by*
Toni Matthias Mey***

The historical novel *From the Nile to the Jordan* is an enthralling story about the "Second Exodus" of Jews from Egypt to Israel. This so far little-noticed aspect of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, could spread new light on the events of 1948, make the suffering of both sides public and bring the middle east one step closer to peace. Before 1948 there was a prospering community with 100,000 Jews in Egypt, today there are only few Jewish widows left.

This book combines the well-researched historical facts based on Aharoni's research on the topic, as a professor of Sociology, with her personal perspective as a witness who had to leave Egypt as a young woman. This approach makes the book an eye-opener for an important chapter of Jewish history, that is widely unknown. Aharoni goes beyond the past, aiming at using the story of the "Second Exodus" as a tool for reconciliation, convinced that if Israel and Egypt can make peace, peace between Israel and Palestine is possible too.

Ada Aharoni is a writer, poet and professor, in the field of "Conflict Resolution and Peace Research," who was born in Cairo, Egypt, and lives today in Haifa, Israel. So far, she published 34 books, that have won her international acclaim and many prizes. Growing up in the 1940's in Cairo, speaking French as her mother tongue and going to an English School, the young Ada was integrated in the Jewish community. She was deeply inspired by the poetry of the British Peace Poet, Wilfred Owen and she decided that her vocation would be like his, a poet and writer for eliminating the concept and practice of war from our planet.

The novel begins in 1946 in Cairo, when the eighteen years old protagonist 'Inbar', meets the slightly older handsome Raoul. Inbar is part of the Oriental Sephardi Jews, and is over all blessed with a happy childhood. Raoul is an Ashkenazi Jew, who barely survived the holocaust. He only survived, because his father protected him with his strong belief in hope, even when the Nazis already started to execute the lined-up Jews. Ada Aharoni contrasts the collective stories of the Ashkenazi and the Sephardi Jews: "Europe is still licking her wounds and here nothing is touched, all is affluence and sparkle as if the Second World War did not take place at all" (p. 22). In spite of the protests of Inbar's grandmother Nona Zina: "God forbid that you should marry an Ashkenazi!" (25), the young lovers meet each other and have deep discussions. Raoul's

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disillusioned world view reflects his heavy experiences: "All your liberal 'fraternity, equality, and liberty' principles they're all rubbish! During the Holocaust, all these were laid aside like a flimsy curtain and you see the real human stage" (28).

However, Aharoni describes how Jews were a recognized part of the diverse Egyptian society, for example when Inbar and Raoul go to the Cairo Opera House: "In addition to the Egyptians and Jews in the audience, there were representatives from several other ethnic groups: Lebanese, Syrian, Copt, Armenian, Greek and Italian. Most of these were likewise chatting in French, but each group displayed a colorful diversity of characteristics which was obvious in their dress, pronunciation, expression, gesture, smile and laughter" (63).

Equally important, Aharoni's story can serve as a role model for girls and young women: She describes Inbar as a brave girl that faces harassment but questions the patriarchal society in both the Arab Egyptian and the Jewish Egyptian circles and fights to have the same rights as her brother. She clearly stands up against her father, Judge Mosseri, when she wants to go to a summer camp: "I can't read to you tonight be... because you won't allow me to go to the camp with the rest of my friends" (40) and despite her father's anger, she succeeds to accomplish her goal.

As a third dimension, Aharoni includes the class difference and describes the thoughts of Inbar, when she observes, how the children in a poor neighborhood in Cairo play, a boy loses his life in an accident, and nobody seems to care. As Raoul observes "People die all around you even in normal conditions with no war on or anything and nobody cares" (88).

In a very strong middle part of the book, Aharoni manages to weave in the history of the Egyptian Jews, by letting Inbar deliver a fascinating lecture in her Jewish youth group. "Egyptian Jewry dates from the time of the prophet Jeremiah; after the destruction of the First Temple, when Jeremiah and his followers arrived in Egypt and settled here. Since then, there has always been a Jewish community in Egypt" (120). Thus, the reader understands the full tragedy of the uprooting of this ancient, prosperous and highly cultured Jewish community.

The Jews in Egypt, in general, were not allowed to obtain an Egyptian citizenship, but they were treated with respect as "guests of honor", however, the situation drastically changes: "With the establishment of the State of Israel on May 15 ... the Jews are now considered enemies in the eyes of Egyptian authorities" (171). Through the eyes of Inbar, Aharoni shows, how Jewish life was more and more threatened: "As we know, not only Zionist youths have been seized and sent to Huckstep in Heliopolis, and El Tor in the Sinai Desert, and various other concentration and deportation camps, but also several rabbis and leaders of the community. Some have been tortured when they refused to chant: 'Jews are the dogs of the Arabs'" (172). One by one Inbar's friends escaped to Israel or elsewhere. Her grandmother, refuses to be exiled and ends her life together with crashing her fine elegant china, when she throws herself from her staircase. Another very touching moment is, when Inbar's family finally leaves the country and the father tries to access his savings in the Swiss Bank in Marseilles, but the bank account has been sequestered by the Egyptian government. He has his first heart attack then and later dies from a second heart attack.

Raoul is cruelly attacked in a pogrom in the streets of Cairo, and exiled. As soon as Inbar gets to Israel she starts searching for him. After five long years of searching, she finally finds Raoul in Jerusalem, after she thought she had lost him forever: "Only five years?" Inbar asked in wonder. 'It seems more like five thousand years!'" (239) Aharoni uses the meeting of the young couple to symbolize the renaissance of a people from the East and from the West, reunited in the land of Israel.

At the end, Ada Aharoni sends a message of hope, describing the spirit of the creation of the Israeli state. Inbar gives lectures about the "Second Exodus" at the University of Pennsylvania, years after her escape from Egypt. She includes the perspectives of young Palestinian Students, that have difficulties to hear that Jews were uprooted from the Arabic world, when they had always heard that Jews are the oppressors of the Palestinians. She explains the one million-dollar question how the Palestinian - Israel Conflict can be ended: "The difference between the Jewish refugees and the Palestinian refugees is that Israel is ready to absorb all the refugees who want to settle in Israel. However, the Palestinians do not have a state of their own [...] which could absorb the Palestinian refugees wishing to flock to it. [...] The solution to the Arab Israeli conflict is the establishment of a Palestinian State as soon as possible."

This is a powerful story, that can make Palestinians motivate to increase efforts towards peace, by showing them that a big part of the Israeli society are Jews that escaped from Arabic countries. However, unlike the Jews from Arab countries, the Palestinian refugees have until today no state they can return to. The responsibility to work towards peace lies also in the hands of the Israeli government, that should stop talking about annexing the West Bank and rather respect international law and stop the building of settlements that makes a two-state solution unlikely. When thinking about how this story can proliferate the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, it is important to recognize that both sides have suffered and that both need to work toward reconciliation to create a peaceful future.

The famous Israeli novelist, essayist and playwright A.B. Yehoshua said about the Ada Aharoni's story: "I didn't even know that there was a Second Exodus of the Jews from Egypt in my own times! Ada Aharoni has described this astonishing historical period in a superb and most convincing way." A.B. Yehoshua.

I highly recommend reading this sublime historical novel that reconstructs the essence of this vanished Jewish Community in Egypt, and shows how this uprooting can promote reconciliation and peace between Israelis and Palestinians.



Loose Ends: A Tanka String*

Found** in *Minor Poems* by John Milton edited by A.P. Walker (1900)

slight or small
foolish or frivolous
perhaps
less by a semi-tone
or short of maturity

Hymn on the Nativity
with speeches fair
his inferior flame
at last surrounds their sight
with unexpressive notes

Comus
with low-thoughted care
this sin-worn mould –
here their tender age
set at nought the frivolous bolt

Lycidas
rural ditties were not mute
all their echoes mourn –
mediate the thankless Muse
the grim world with privy paw

Sonnets
Thy liquid notes that close
the eye of day
fill thy odorous lamp –
prompt the age to quite their clogs

Notes:

* a tanka string is a set of tanka poems that are “tied” to single subject.

** Found poetry is created by taking words and phrases from other sources and reframing them as a new poem, thus imparting new meaning. After using my own words in the introductory tanka, the four tanka that follow it each use lines found in the titled so-called “minor” poem by Milton.

A Villanelle to Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dead Now One Hundred and Thirty Years*

*All Life does end and each day dies with sleep.***

each day dies with sleep
pitched past pitch of grief
thus for him we weep

after us does creep
knave remorse, love's thief
each day dies with sleep

from the dark so deep
follows dawn's relief
thus for him we weep

kept his faith, a leap
we wake with belief
each day dies with sleep

on the mountain peak
dapple-dawn, gold-leaf
thus for him we weep

for his sake we seek
slant rhyme's hard won peace
each day lives with sleep
thus for him we weep
blow gently, blow gently, blow gently.

– Dr. Neal Whitman*

Notes:

- * Hopkins died on 8 June 1889, a mostly unread poet whose work was posthumously recognized, but by the 1930s accepted as one of the most original poets of the 20th century.

- ** from his poem, "No Worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief."

* An American poet, Dr. Whitman is Professor Emeritus, School of Medicine, University of Utah, USA. Address: 814 Todd Lane, Pacific Grove, California- 93950, USA. Email: neal.pgpoet@gmail.com.

Yearning for Empty Eternity

Time turns around
Turns around
Like a point on the horizon far from parting
Contracting
Shining
The dead settle
In the heart and do not relent
They disappear, they reappear
Constantly.

Their love is like a well-kept house
In a golden homeland
On its walls a treasure of shared memories
And it lives and breathes them
Every moment anew.

There are those who open an album every day
For fear that memories will fade
I do not understand
How their image is as clear in my heart as yesterday
And their voices echo in me
Pure as the color blue

I hear my grandfather
Trilling melodies
As the day breaks
It vibrates within me and the voice
Of my brother Absalom
Like a song in my heart's chambers
And my grandmother's tears
As she fell from my hands
Now fall on my cheeks...
Time turns on its axis.
The love of the dead lives
Like dew-fresh grass.

A Spray of First Rain

I stride into the darkness
Winds dance around my nape
Howling jackals and slanting rain.

The guard in his meager shack
Hides his anxieties.
A fox along the way
Looks out among the rocks
Waiting.

Fears of the past
Meet the wet nocturnal scene
Abandoned to the first raindrops
The imaginative power— and to
The creator of the poem.

A bridge opens setting alight
Memories and insights
Like bright reality on a screen:

Of the threshold of my mother's,
My father's days,
My noisy brothers
And threads of sorrow wound
Around my neck

The blackness of my father's beard
My grandfather's blind white eyes
And my mother's rough hands
Drawing on the easel of my heart

A sapling trembling in the wind
Turns its face skyward
But the wind bends its crown
To stare at its roots

In a corm of fears
Planted in the earth
A spray now like the first rain
From a cocoon of clouds.

– Dr. Rachelly (Chelly) Abraham-Eitan*

* Dr. Eitan is an Israeli poet. She has published nine books of poetry, two literary research studies and children book which have won prestigious prizes, including the Prime Minister's Award for Poetry. She is a participant in the Ministry of Education's Guest Author Project. Email: chelly.eitan@gmail.com.

Beginning with the End

I have been a prolonged sigh of my past
Burning myself and the Time
Lost in eons of searching
And scrambling for truth
Found at last
Ensconced in the roots.

At the site I started the journey
The goal has been found
Dwelling for ages
Seeking its destiny.
The trek was a tiring delusion
Achievements and records are melted memories.
The milestones, the goalposts, the glories
I ever touched are all dissolving
At the sight of the destination
Track found disappearing.

I'm now a floating point
In flaming expanse of Time
No trail ahead nor behind.
Enshrined in an enveloping presence
Gracefully I sit on the altar
Performing the rituals of life.
No longer perturbed by the noise, the heat, the crowd
No longer held to the moments scattered around
The smiles, the tears, the memories, the loneliness
I now know, nothing was ever mine.

Destination has collected me
From the desolate corners of my destiny.
The mirror has shown me my reflection.
I can see
There, at the other side,
Someone is standing
With the arms stretched to infinity
Waiting for me.

Face to Face

Running relentlessly,
brushing questions aside,
carrying on the back, a tad of Time
is perhaps the only ask.

Giving warm touch to the shivering flower
under the snow-cap there,
is beyond me.

No time to nurse a bleeding heart.

No guts to stand and stare.

Only a moment's pause
and the music goes offbeat.

Aims and ambitions may fall asunder.

Wide open eyes of the whole world to follow me.

And around me are the deluge of my dreams and desires.

Hence, Till I am completely drowned

Running is the only ask.

But someone smirks inside

Often yanks me too hard

I wonder,

If ever it comes out

And asks for accounts

What should be my answer!

That day, should I explain

How the chirping birds

And the humming woods

Fasten the bloodstream in my veins!

How, the docks in the ponds,

the floating clouds,

even a faint image of river bank

steal my breath!

At some bent behind
The colours of emotions had faded in my being
Today, the colours of tender flowers
Terrify time.
That day, should I confess,
face to face!

– Sushri Sangita Mishra*

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The Eagle on the Scaffolding

I was sitting at the window deep in thought.
The golf course spread all around.
I looked up and saw an eagle near my window.
Never was this bird so close found.

It was sitting on the scaffolding.
It too was deep in thought.
Two different creatures looking eye to eye.
Where was the connection? We are a different lot.

I was sitting in a library
silence and peace in the room.
Splashes of flowers in the vases.
Decorations of weaves and looms.

The eagle was on the scaffolding.
Observing me all through.
Me the curious soul in reciprocal gaze
Observing it through and through.

I was sitting at the window that fine day.
When I first realised the beauty of the predator.
A beauty so primordial, so full of grace.
Felt content to assimilate the hidden charm of the sky aviator.

Walking Down Pochkanawala Road

The tar road below, the blue sky above.
Birds going home, a few sparrows, a fluttering dove.
All around green and greenery.
A feast to the eyes, a beautiful scenery.

The tar road below and the sky above me.
Cool breeze and the scent of the sea.
Walking down the road deep in thought,
About how much I gave and what I got.

The tar road below and the cerulean blue around.
I asked myself, "How much happiness have I found?"
Walking down the road of life.
limitless joy and some injuries rife.

The tar road below and above the clouds floating by.
Did I help others? Did I reach out and try?
With countless blessings all the way.
Shouldn't I spread happiness to all each day?

– Dr. Paramita Mukherjee Mullick*

* Dr. Mullick is a scientist, educationist and author. She lives in Mumbai, India.
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I was and still am

I was and still am, but some day
I won't be,
to gather home nothingness every day

Even that day
a bird will fly over the fields
leaving a shadow behind as they do

When the world warms up with
the golden hues playing hide
and seek with sun and shade,
when the tempestuous winds
blow all straws
to the horizon,
in a spring afternoon
sighs will echo in a crescendo
near and far, to say,
Someone was there the other day!
Even that day the birds
will fly over the fields
leaving intimate warm shadows behind,
and the world will sleep relaxed
with its legs stretched out
even that day
will look like
any other day!!

The Tortoise Family

A family of tortoises
live across the street
at the end of a land
in the long road.....

Down the avenue of
eucalyptus trees
that remind me
of heights, strength
and cool umbrella-shadows
beneath.....

It is a beautiful family
father, mother
a boy and a girl,
busy the
whole day
with their day to
day life and labour ...

I want to say
hello to them,
to hold their
tiny hands,
and just say a
big thank you
for leaving
such clear
footprints to
follow from
dawn to dusk ...

As I think of the
fable's ending,
tears
drop from my
eyes

I am slow and
steady now,
industrious and
hard working,
because I
want to win
just that race
that matters ...

– **Dr. Rumki Basu***

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Reflection

The fragrant bouquets bow in reverence
To the framed silver photograph
Paying obeisance
Like a priest when he chants
Eyes closed, palms joined.
The wreath of flowers,
A meditative amalgam
Encircling the frame, in solemnity,
Homage to a gentle, meditative soul,
A *Yogi*, call him whatever,
Saying it all with his ubiquitous smile.
Misconstrued and misused
He had rejected none,
Forgiving and encompassing
All those who had sought him out.
A solitary pilgrim
On his wondrous pilgrimage
With me, blessed, lying prostrate
A silent griever, a mirror image.

Seclusion

The rocking chair oscillate
Back and forth and back,
Who, she wondered,

Would take over her silent Space
Once when it stops in its track?
Forsaken, forlorn,
In an empty space zone
Her world limited to

The chequered cheerless canvas rocker
Inertia, in a secluded lonely world
Musings and Reminiscences,
Ode to a misty past and

A vacant future
Like a persistent, perennial ache
Her confined world rocked silently
Back and forth and back.

– Rumna Mitra Lala*

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The Societal Disguise

My wishful wait for the bus gave way
a rustic whistle wildly gushed past
I muttered mildly
at the sight of its insane speed.

In mustering my mental strength;
to try whistling at a length,
amidst the vivacious vibrant youth,
around me at the bus stop - appealed uncouth.

My whistling attempt went in vain,
leaving the voice box with a strange pain.
A simple long cherished wish
my gait of life would miss.

Whistling, a taboo for women
has been rehearsed, relished
in privacy without waking the world
in which I live as I should.

I dare not weaken my social image.
hypocritical hiding of a true face
plays a pivotal part of professionalism.
Is there any avenue for nihilism?

At times it looks smooth to be lulled
by societal doctrines – stereotyped.
A deviation from dogmas may get you ostracized.
But, how to live plastic in the ceramic world?

Friendship Nostalgia

No doubt - you are my friend
whether you sulk or talk.
You comprehend my interests
I value your perceptions.

Distance cannot separate us
we delve deep into
those treasured memories
spent together in our hometown.

I know well - Friendship is selfless
willing sacrifices often made
Compatibility uncompromised
despite our blunders and blemishes.

So, be not bothered about these
snobbish societal strictures-which
hurt and humiliate with a
pretentious posture of perfection.

Is there a need for perfection
in friendship? Which of course
sustains a concept - abstract
as we are born imperfect?

– Dr. P. Malathy*

* Dr. Malathy is a bilingual poet (English and Tamil) and Assistant Professor, PG and Research Department of English, Government Arts College (Autonomous), Coimbatore – 641018, Tamilnadu, India. Email: prof.p.malathy@gmail.com.

Where This Journey Ends

Sailing across the sea
of open water
makes me think
of the life I have lived so far
journey of a thousand miles
genetic memory
returning
like salmon spawning.
Holding hands tightly
you whisper
your desire to go back
a primal place
where you once belonged.
I felt the pain
of a hooked fish.
I am unsure
here it all ends
or here it begins?

Joy Returns with Morning Light

I talk
to my invisible friends at night
they listen with inscrutable faces
they do not argue.
I tell them about
the hopes in my eyes
desires in my mouth
and fears in my heart.
Words fail me
constantly moving
shifting feelings
until I am exhausted.
They leave me alone, confused
I weep through the night
joy comes in the morning.
You are more in me
than I in you and
you remain while
obliviously I go outside looking for you

– Ashok Bhargava*

* *Mr. Bhargava is an Axlepin Poet Laureate and has won several awards including Poet Ambassador, Writers Beyond Borders, Kalidasa International and World Poetry Lifetime Achievement Award. He is founder of Writers International Network Canada Society. Email: bhargava2000@yahoo.com.*

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